

new zealand gardener

JUNE 2016

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escape winter

20

gardens you
must see for
yourself!

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GARDENER'S

Bucket list

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MORE FRUIT IN LESS SPACE ✿ MAKE
CARAMELISED NUTS ✿ GREAT FLAXES

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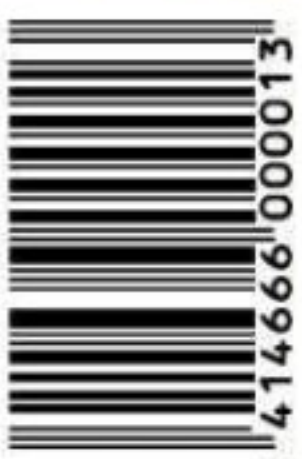
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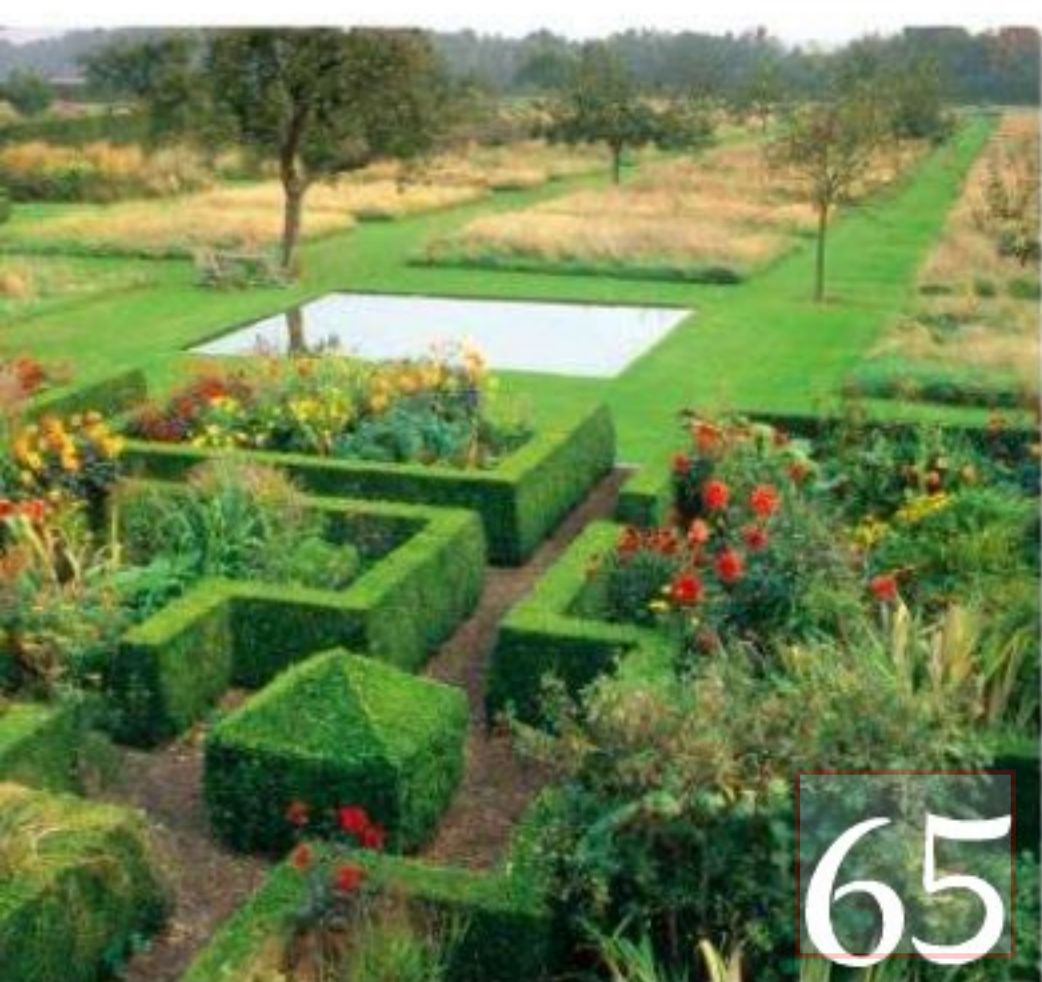
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Editor: Jo McCarroll
Editor At Large: Lynda Hallinan
Deputy Editor: Christine Rush
Art Director: Sarah Scully
Editorial Assistant: Barbara Smith
Picture Editor: Sybille Hetet
Northern Region Manager: David Penny
Group editor, Life: Bridget Hope
Distribution Manager: Magazines: Liz Badenhorst
Marketing: Fiona Peacocke
Production Manager: Sara Hirst
Design Pool Manager: Olivia Tuck

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES
Ph: (09) 909 6897, fax: (09) 909 6802
Email: mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz
Story archives/photo sales email:
sybille.hetet@fairfaxmags.co.nz

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES
Ph: (09) 909 6894, fax: (09) 909 6802
Advertising Manager: Alison Shrigley
Email: alison.shrigley@nzgardener.co.nz
Advertising Coordinator: Garima Bajaj
Advertising Agency Sales: Ph (09) 970 4000

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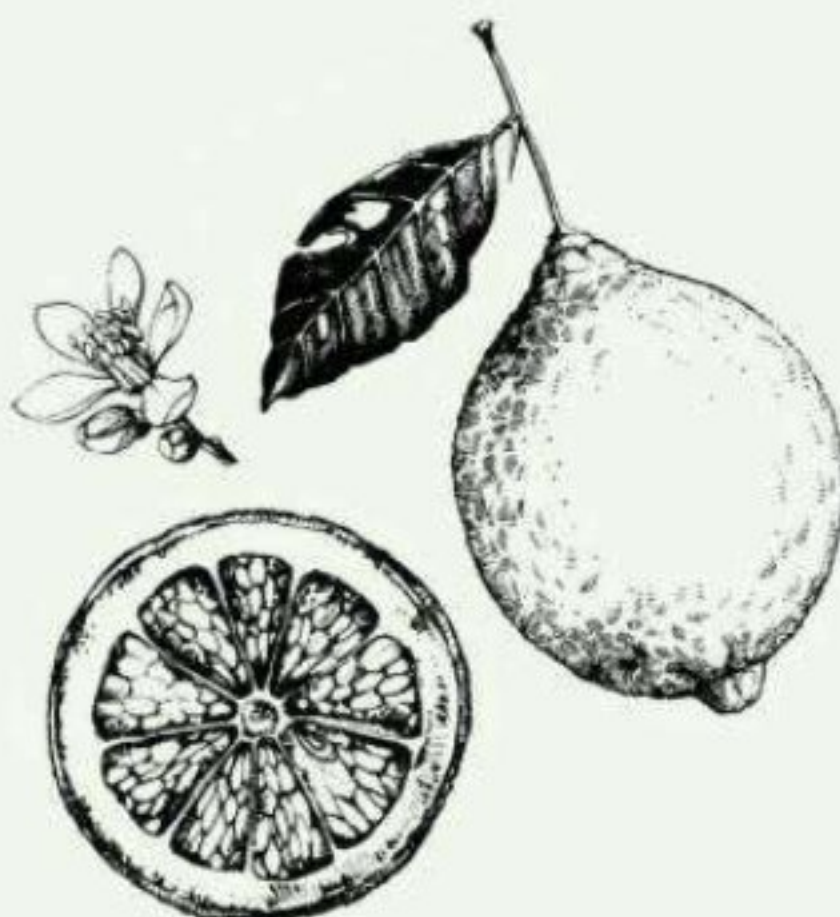
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PHOTO: SALLY TAGG



*'It is in the garden
that men discover
themselves'
Confucius*



If there is one single thing that every Kiwi knows about growing lemons, it's that Southern speedster Burt Munro used to pee on the tree in his Invercargill garden. Others might disagree with me, but I would say it is what Burt Munro is best known for (I mean, I know he set land speed records too, but really if you want to see someone go nowhere fast, I say watch them try and grow citrus in Southland).

Kiwis know this story, of course, because of the film *The World's Fastest Indian* in which Burt Munro (played by Anthony Hopkins) says to the boy-next-door Tom (played by Aaron Murphy) that while he was away racing in Utah, Tom could come round and relieve himself on said tree.

The actual dialogue in the film goes like this:

Burt Munro: Oh yes, ah, you can pee on my lemon tree for me if you like, while I'm away. And ah... (looks at Tom who is shaking his head vigorously). Well, there's nothing wrong with peeing on your lemon tree. As Confucius used to say, it's the best natural fertiliser in the world.

Tom: Who's Confucius?

Burt Munro: Oh, he's some bloke who lives up in Dunedin.

The World's Fastest Indian, which I assume most of you have probably seen, is an absolutely charming film, and it is one that New Zealanders have well and truly taken to their hearts. Especially the lemon tree bit which has become a universally held gardening truth here. When I asked NZ *Gardener's* facebook community whether or not they peed on their own citrus trees, at least half of the readers who responded said they did it and most actually mentioned the motorcycling great. Lesley Burns of Dunedin even called the action "doing a Burt Munro".

Which is what makes the news I have to impart all the more shocking, dear reader. I was writing about citrus care for my what to sow and plant column this month, and the story of Burt Munro came into my mind. Because we take nothing for granted here at NZ *Gardener*, I decided to research whether peeing on your citrus crop was actually beneficial for it – it occurred to me it could be one of those old wives' tales with which gardening is rife, where something is held to be true simply because it is said often enough (cough, like coffee grounds deterring snails, cough).

And in my research I came upon a shocking footnote to a story about *The World's Fastest Indian*. Apparently there is no evidence that Burt Munro actually peed on his lemon tree! This was a practise favoured by the film's director Roger Donaldson's father and so Roger had added the detail to the film as a tribute to his dad.

Well, I reeled, dear reader. I was rocked. As a journalist I knew there was a story here. Did he pee... Or not he pee? That was the question.

After numerous phone calls I made contact with Murray Thwaites, who now resides in Auckland but who grew up over the fence from Mr Munro in Invercargill. As a boy, Murray told me, he could climb the fence and be outside the garage where Burt worked for years to modify his Indian Scout (and where he eventually ended up living). Murray says he can still remember the smell of the engine oil.

But whether Burt had, ah-hem, watered his lemon tree, Murray had to admit didn't know. He himself had never peed on the tree, he told me, although other local boys might have. But he had never heard stories about Burt doing so either.

Could it be that our best-known piece of gardening trivia is based on a lie? Surely someone out there knows for sure. This is a big story readers, with repercussions for all our citrus crops. Together we can – and will – find out the truth.

Jo

Jo McCarroll

Mailbox



CHECK OUT OUR PUMPKIN CROP!

These gourds were grown in good soil, with lots of manure worked into it. They were grown through a very dry season, and we watered them by hand to get them established. We don't use chemical fertilisers or sprays in our vegetable garden because we believe that all plants would do better without them, as the chemicals kill the microbes that collect and transport nutrients down to the plant's roots, instead locking up the nutrients in the soil and making them unavailable. These microbe chains can span many metres from the plant.

Carmen Weeks, TIMARU

WE'VE BUILT A ROADSIDE STALL

Thanks for the article on roadside stalls in the February issue of *NZ Gardener*. It inspired me to take the plunge and create my own with the help of my clever, handy husband who made up the cart for me using a pre-loved bicycle and wood offcuts (plus a cash box fashioned out of an old wine bottle!). The sun-shade and bunting, which I made, gives it a cheery look, and I wheel it out into the driveway whenever I am home and about. I fill it with surplus plants, fruit from our various fruit trees and craft items that I enjoy creating. A great, fun way to generate a little extra income.

Annette Wright, CHRISTCHURCH

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Reading Joe Bennett's column on mishearing the old Christmas carol as a child in the May issue, reminded me of one of my mother's sayings when I was growing up near London in the 1930s. If I came in from play really dirty she would say, "You're as black as nookers snocker." Many years later, as a teenager, I was at a party in the East End and felt such a fool when I came out with this phrase, only to be told that it really was "As black as Newgate's Knocker". I have often heard things like this myself from children; one little girl said to her mother after church: "Why don't they know me?" Puzzled, the mother asked why and the little girl said, "Well, they were singing Who's Anna?" When my son came home from his first day at school he was delighted to say a friend lived at "Shit meadow", before he was swiftly corrected as the name of the village was in fact Shipmeadow. And my nieces, when told we were going to a pub lunch for pie n' chips, said they did not think they would like "pine chips". Do grown-ups speak so badly or is it children's impaired hearing? Thank you Joe for bringing so many memories back.

I have always enjoyed gardening both in England and for the past 15 years here in the Nelson area. It has become even more special since the death of my beloved husband in January. And when it becomes too dark to garden your magazine is there to give inspiration for the next day.

Sheila Pitman, MOTUEKA



HEY – THOSE AREN'T APPLES!

The photo above shows my apple tree with eight pumpkins, which I did not know were there because of my failing eyesight. In mid-March when the apples and leaves started to fall, there they were! Some needed cradling. I have found that the better-tasting pumpkins are further down along the vines, so I do not nip off too many. Plus I might have found the answer for spreading vines in a small garden!
Athol Stuckey, AUCKLAND

POHUTUKAWAS ARE MY PICK

I have to side with Margaret on the debate discussed in Jo's editorial in May about whether pohutukawas or kowhai should be our national tree. We have both on our property and although they are relatively young, the pohutukawas win hands down for wow factor. The kowhai, while pretty, can look a bit tatty at times while my pohutukawas stay interesting at all times of the year – just like New Zealand!
Claire King, PALMERSTON NORTH

MY VOTE GOES TO KOWHAI

I have followed the debate about a possible national tree with interest. I vote for Gordon Collier's pick of kowhai; I understand from family members that colour blind people can't see pohutukawa flowers. And kowhai has the bonus of attracting tui – such a lovely combination in the spring. Kowhai lifts the spirits in a way pseudopanax, cabbage trees or ferns can't.
Jan Harris, OTAKI



CHECK OUT MY FROGGY FRIEND

Walking past the flax by my front door, I could feel someone watching me. I did not expect to find a green and golden bell frog! Immediately nicknamed Kermit, he is happy to sit and listen while I tell him how gorgeous he is. He also lets me take endless photos of him, and in return, I sprinkle him with the hose. I live in urban Hamilton, nowhere near a water source, so have no idea where he has appeared from. But he is more than welcome to eat as many of the bugs in my garden as he likes.
Sandra Robinson, HAMILTON

LESSONS FROM MY FIRST SEASON

I love your magazine and learn so much each month. As a novice vegetable gardener I have enjoyed the last six months growing plants to grace our plate: corn, potatoes, strawberries, lettuce, radishes, capsicums, chillies, tomatoes, beetroot, leeks, courgettes and broccoli. I had a failure with the capsicums; but I have made tomato relish from the vast harvest and lemon honey from golden courgettes. But my main lesson? Next season I will not grow five cucumber plants! (Though the neighbours enjoyed the plentiful supply.)
Dianne Burgoyne, ONERAHI



HENK'S GIANT PUMPKIN

I have just come back from visiting my Dad, Henk (90), who lives in Wairarapa. I got some giant pumpkin seeds from the NZ Gardener promo you ran some time ago and sent them to him; the photo is the result! Sadly it was too heavy for me to turn over to photograph its best side. The pumpkin weighs about 80-100kg but he thinks it could have been twice as big if it hadn't been damaged after some neighbours tried to lift it. Even so, once it was harvested they got it in a wheelbarrow to send to the local school gala for judging it and it tipped over!

His method for growing giant pumpkins is to dig a big hole, around two feet deep, then fill it with compost. The patch around the hole was hoed and lime and fertiliser worked in. Once the soil was prepared the plant was put in alongside a field tile for drainage and easy watering.

He cuts the pumpkins, leaving plenty of stalk, and stores them in his woodshed, turning occasionally. This way they last till the end of January and still taste sweet.

I am so proud of my Dad as he is still active and his vege garden puts lots of neighbours in his district to shame.
Carolyn Hilhorst, AUCKLAND

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Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
				1		2		3		4		5 ● New moon 15:00	
				Sow root vegetables on the 1st & 2nd.				June 3-7 is the new moon period. Vitality is increasing but don't sow yet, just cultivate and prepare soil.					
6 		7		8 		9		10		11		12 ● First quarter	
								June 8-16 is the first quarter phase and the best days of this month to sow vegetables that produce edible leaves or flowers. Silverbeet and spinach seed can go into areas of your garden that are ready for a cold season crop now too.					
13 		14		15		16 		17		18		19 	
						Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 16th & 17th.							
20 ○ Full moon 23:02		21		22		23		24		25 		26	
The full moon period, June 18-22, is a resting time for people and plants. Pruning is the activity of choice and the month ends with a period when it suits to spray, if you use sprays.						On the 23rd & 24th sow more root veges.							
27 		28 ● Last quarter		29		30 		COLOUR CODING KEY Sow and plant Cultivate only Barren period Sow root crops					

OTOS: SALLY TAGG

THIS MONTH...



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Test 'homemade' NPK

• Should or shouldn't you pee on citrus?

Southland speedster Burt Munro famously used to pee on his lemon tree. (Although there are rumours that Munro never did, and that detail was added to the film *The World's Fastest Indian* because director Roger Donaldson's own father espoused the practice.) But is it actually a good idea? Human urine is mainly water, but also contains nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus – which are what plants need to thrive and the ingredients in most fertilisers, plus our digestive system strips those nutrients down into a form plants can easily take up. (One permaculturist suggested that the urine from a family of four could produce the equivalent of a 50kg bag of NPK fertiliser every year.) A study at a university in Finland has found that beetroot fertilised by urine and wood ash performed better than beets treated with chemical fertilisers. Home gardeners also report, however, that urine applied undiluted has caused symptoms of nutrient burn (remember citrus has shallow and delicate roots). I asked another famous Southlander, Robert Guyton, for his thoughts. He said the "to pee or not to pee" question "haunts every gardener" in his region. His advice is that the occasional sprinkle may do some good, "but drenching the poor citrus often would cause it to wither and worse, pong. A beer-drinking Southlander could even cause his lemon to expire, though a health conscious, water-drinking man of the soil down here would do little harm with his regular irrigations."

• It's June, so get garlic in the ground.

Traditionally it's planted on the shortest day (June 21) although if you plant by the moon, wait until June 23 or 24 when it's a suitable phase to plant root crops. Whenever you plan to plant, break up bulb into separate seed cloves a few days in advance (it helps break them out of dormancy), and prepare the soil where you plan to plant by digging in compost or a slow-release fertiliser.

• Sow broad beans and peas for spring.

These tough legumes germinate in cold soil so you can sow direct, but if it's so cold and wet and you'd prefer to work inside, sow in trays and plant them out when established instead! Plant more brassica seedlings now too, but if you can, do so in a different spot to last year to prevent hard-to-beat club root infection getting a toehold in your soil.



Prune fruit trees

• Spend some time in your orchard.

Winter is the time to prune your fruit trees if you want to control their shape (whereas you prune in summer if you want to reduce their vigour). You can minimise diseases by spraying pip- and stonefruit with a broad spectrum copper spray, such as Yates Copper Oxychloride, which helps eradicate overwintering bacterial and fungal infections; and a horticultural oil, like Yates Conqueror Spraying Oil, which provides a physical barrier against scale, mites and mealy bug. Spray again with copper in spring, especially stonefruit which are prone to fungal problems and when symptoms appear, it's too late to treat. Jo McCarroll

Time for a Winter clean-up

Many garden pests and diseases take shelter or lie dormant during winter, so this is the perfect time to seek out their hiding places and get rid of them.

Otherwise they'll make it through winter and start building up their numbers again in spring.

Make that a combo!

If time is precious, or you're not keen on being outside in the cold for too long, try combining two of Yates® top Winter clean-up products.

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PACK THEM IN

Kate Marshall shows how to get more bang for your buck with fruit trees when space is limited



When multi-tree planting, choose fruit of the same type, such as plum varieties that cross-pollinate but ripen in succession

It can be difficult to choose which fruit trees to plant when space is limited, and you have to choose just one apple variety from the wide selection available. But if you're clever with your planting technique or tree selection you can fit more trees in for a wider range of fruit, harvested over a longer season. Even on a 600sqm section you can pack in a number of fruiting plants and trees, by being creative with space and using garden areas productively.

Planting techniques

Fruit tree hedges: Planted closely together to form a hedge, fruit trees can conceal a wall, line a driveway edge or block out an unwanted view. Plant trees about 1m apart so that growth is reasonably dense once established, and prune the trees hard when planting to promote the growth of low branches, which will make picking easier. Deciduous fruit trees, citrus and feijoas make excellent edible hedges. For smaller ones plant blueberries and New Zealand cranberries (*Myrtus ugni*).

Multi-tree planting in one hole: Instead of spacing them out, planting several trees within one (large) hole is a shrewd method to cram more fruit into your garden. Choose fruit trees of the same type, such as plum varieties that cross pollinate but ripen in succession. Dig a large hole around 1m wide by 40-50cm deep. Prune the trees so that all of the branches will only grow outwards – aim for low branches so the fruit is easily reached. Plant trees with around a 50cm gap in the middle between the trunks. By choosing fruit trees of the same type, the roots will bond together to form a strong anchor, despite the branches of each tree growing in one direction.

Root control bags: Root restriction is the oldest trick in the book; it reduces vigorous leafy growth and induces heavy crops early in the life

of the trees. Specially designed polypropylene growing bags can be used for trees planted in the ground, or kept as a container plant – the handles make the tree easier to move. Root control bags are also known as bonsai bags, and can be found at some garden centres and rural supply stores, or from fieldhort.co.nz. As with all types of container growing, trees in bonsai bags (above or below ground) will need more regular watering and fertilising than trees planted directly into the soil.

Tree types

Double- and triple-grafted trees: Some fruit varieties aren't self-fertile, so to produce fruit they need another, different variety of the same species nearby to cross-pollinate. If space is limited however, planting two full-sized trees is not an option. Cleverly propagated double-grafted (or dual-grafted) and triple-grafted trees have two or three cross-pollinating varieties grafted onto the same tree. These are a good use of space but need to be pruned carefully to manage excessive vigour of the dominant variety, so that the other variety isn't sacrificed.

Dwarf trees: Diminutive in nature, but big on production, dwarf fruit varieties have naturally stunted growth, indicated by the small distance between each leaf bud (or short leaf internodes). These varieties are grafted onto standard rootstocks, as it's the actual variety that dwarfs the tree. The tree may be small but the fruit is full sized, and are produced in large quantities. My own dwarf apple 'Blush Babe', grown in a pot, produced over 80 fruit in its third season. The cute dwarf peaches such as 'Garden Lady' and nectarine 'Garden Delight' are mop-headed trees that hide bucket-loads of produce beneath their lush leaves. Growing to just 1.8-2m tall and about

the same width, these trees are perfect in any small garden or patio pot. Use a wine barrel (or equivalent size) and top-quality potting mix. Other dwarf trees include the tart cherry 'Griotella', apricot 'Aprigold', pear 'Garden Belle' and even a dwarf almond 'Garden Prince'.

Dwarf rootstocks

Another way to get more trees into your garden is to use smaller-growing trees grafted onto dwarf rootstocks. Differing to dwarf varieties, some specially selected dwarfing rootstocks are popular for apple and cherry trees. The rootstock is the part of the tree that is in the dirt – about 20cm up from the ground you will be able to see the graft, with the fruiting variety on top. All dwarf rootstocks are sensitive, so need fertile and free-draining soil (clay is no good). On the back of the orchard industry, there are several types of dwarf apple rootstocks available. The two main sorts are the "super dwarf" M27 producing a tree that grows to just 1.5m tall, and the more common M9 dwarf rootstock which creates a 2m-tall tree.

For cherry trees the rootstock 'Edabriz' is used for its dwarfing influence, producing a tree around 2m-tall which is still very productive with normal-sized cherries.

The dwarfing rootstock for citrus named 'Flying Dragon' reduces vigour by 30-40 per cent. Citrus grafted onto this rootstock are perfect for small sites and pots.

Sometimes pear trees are labelled as being on dwarf rootstock, but this should be treated with some caution. Quince rootstocks (like BA29 or Quince C) are used for pear trees, and produce a smaller-growing tree than those grafted onto pear seedlings, but the trees will still reach 4m-tall or more – so are not as dwarf as one might think! ❀



Take the heat

We know herbs taste best fresh, but does heating, drying or cooking them lessen their other beneficial properties? Jane Wrigglesworth reports



Vitamin E is affected by light and air. It is in many herbs, which is one reason why they should be stored in low light, in airtight containers

What would roast lamb be without rosemary? Or pasta sauce without basil? Whether used fresh or dried, herbs can take a dish from good to great with their lively, aromatic flavours. Fish, for example, can be enlivened with dill, while tarragon has an affinity with chicken. Oregano goes well with beans, while fresh salads are infinitely more delicious with a smattering of fresh herbs. Take a leaf out of a Tudor recipe book: a fresh salad often incorporated around 30 different herbs and flowers. By mixing in a tiny amount of each herb, a truly gourmet delight is created.

Raw or cooked?

The burning question is, though, do herbs lose their vitamins and minerals when cooked? The short answer is yes. The longer answer is yes and no.

Retention of vitamins depends on how the dish has been prepared. Some vitamins, in particular Vitamins C and B5, are heat-sensitive and will dissipate when exposed to heat. Vitamin C is also soluble in water. For example, one Danish study showed that boiling broccoli for just five minutes caused up to 65 per cent of its Vitamin C to be lost.

The water-soluble B vitamins are also lost when boiled in water – or rather, they leach into the water. Some of it is lost altogether when boiled excessively, but much will remain, and that water can be saved to make sauces and soups to get the benefits of the vitamins.

This means that the less contact with water and shorter cooking time of fruit, herbs and vegetables, the more C and B vitamins are retained. In the same Danish study, almost

100 per cent of the water-soluble vitamins were retained when the broccoli was instead steamed for five minutes.

The fat-soluble vitamins (Vitamins A, D, E and K), on the other hand, are unaffected by heat or water. These vitamins are absorbed into the oil of stir-fries or salad dressings, but that's not a problem as you will be consuming these.

Vitamin E is, however, affected by light and air. It is in many dried herbs, which is one reason why they should be stored in low light in airtight containers. Vitamin K – found in dried basil, coriander, marjoram, parsley, sage, thyme and fresh basil, chives and parsley – is affected by light too.

Vitamin C is also affected by exposure to air, which is why levels are often higher in frozen vegetables than fresh ones, which can degrade while in storage. Frozen vegetables are processed quickly after harvesting, so they retain a good deal of nutrients.

Minerals are not affected by heat but they do leach out into the cooking water. When making an infusion, or a herbal tea, for medicinal purposes, you will get all the minerals from that herb in the water. You will also get most of the water-soluble vitamins, but not the fat-soluble ones.

Dried herbs

So do herbs lose their vitamins, minerals and antioxidants in the drying process? Again, the answer is yes and no.

In 2003, the American Society for Nutritional Sciences published a study that assessed the levels of antioxidants in certain dried herbs. (Such antioxidants include phenolic acids, flavonoids, tannins, stilbenes,

DID YOU KNOW?

Dried herbs will keep for up to two years if stored out of light in a cool, dry place – so putting them near your dishwasher or some other humidity-generating appliance will cause them to deteriorate in flavour and appearance

curcuminoids, coumarins, lignans and quinones, among others.) Of those tested, oregano, sage, thyme, peppermint, lemon balm, clove, allspice and cinnamon as well as the Chinese medicinal herbs *Cinnamomi cortex* and *Scutellaria baicalensis* all contained very high concentrations of antioxidants (more than 75mmol per 100g). Sweet marjoram, hyssop, tansy, anise hyssop and purple coneflowers had medium levels (between 23 and 56 mmol per 100g). Roseroot stem, German chamomile, European angelica and coriander all had relatively low concentrations (between 1 and 18 mmol per 100g).

The study concluded that, for the dried herbs with very high levels of antioxidants: "In a normal diet, daily intake of 1g such herbs may make a relevant contribution to the



DANDELION PESTO

This recipe can be used as a dip or a salad dressing and is delicious served over vegetable pastas made with raw zucchini, beets or pumpkins.

Ingredients • 2 cups fresh dandelion greens • 1 cup raw cashews
• 3 tablespoons lemon juice
• 3 cloves garlic • ½ cup organic sunflower oil • 1 cup basil or mixed garden herbs like French sorrel, mint, parsley and oregano • 1 cup water
• 1 teaspoon salt

Mix all ingredients in a blender until it forms a creamy texture.

Most herbs, including basil, chives and parsley, are best added near the end of cooking, or just before serving

total intake of plant antioxidants, and be an even better source of dietary antioxidants than many other food groups.”

Vitamins are a different matter. These are partially lost in the drying process. To give one example (from nutritiondata.self.com), 30g of fresh basil provides 30 per cent of the daily value (DV,

or the percentage a serving of the food contributes to your daily needs) for Vitamin A, 8 per cent of the DV for Vitamin C and 145 per cent of the DV for Vitamin K. Take the dried equivalent of basil, or 1 tablespoon, and you get 4 per cent of the DV for Vitamin A, 2 per cent of the DV for Vitamin C and 43 per cent of the DV for Vitamin K. (Though the latter figure is still a good amount.)

Most minerals are hardly affected, although the DV for manganese drops from 16 per cent in fresh herbs to 3 per cent in dried herbs.

Herbs in cooking

Even though some nutrients may be lost, herbs still impart wonderful flavours to food. Most of them, however, including basil, dill, chervil, chives and parsley, are best added near the end of cooking in the last five minutes, or mixed in just before serving, to keep their flavour. Stronger-flavoured herbs, such as sage, rosemary, savory and thyme, can take a little more cooking; these are often added to casseroles to enhance a dish.

So which herbs and spices go best with certain dishes? It's really a matter of taste, but here are a few suggestions.

Soups: Bay leaf, chervil, tarragon, marjoram, parsley, savory, rosemary, sorrel.

Cheese: Basil, chervil, chives, curry powder, dill, fennel, garlic, chives, marjoram, oregano, parsley, sage, thyme.

Salads: Basil, chives, chervil, tarragon, parsley, sorrel, lovage, lemon balm, cress, nasturtium, rocket, parcel, different mints, garlic, dill, dandelion leaves.

Fruit: Star anise, cinnamon, coriander, cloves, ginger, mint, lemon balm, lemon verbena.

Bread: Caraway, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, thyme.

Lamb: Garlic, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, thyme, mint.

Poultry: Bay leaf, chervil, tarragon, marjoram, parsley, savory, lemon balm, lemon verbena, lemon myrtle.

Beef: Bay leaf, chives, cloves, cumin, garlic, hot pepper, marjoram, rosemary, savory, thyme.

Pork: Coriander, cumin, garlic, ginger, sage, savory, thyme.

Fish: Chervil, dill, fennel, tarragon, garlic, parsley, thyme, lemon myrtle.

Vegetables: Basil, chervil, chives, dill, tarragon, mint, parsley, thyme, oregano, sage, savory.

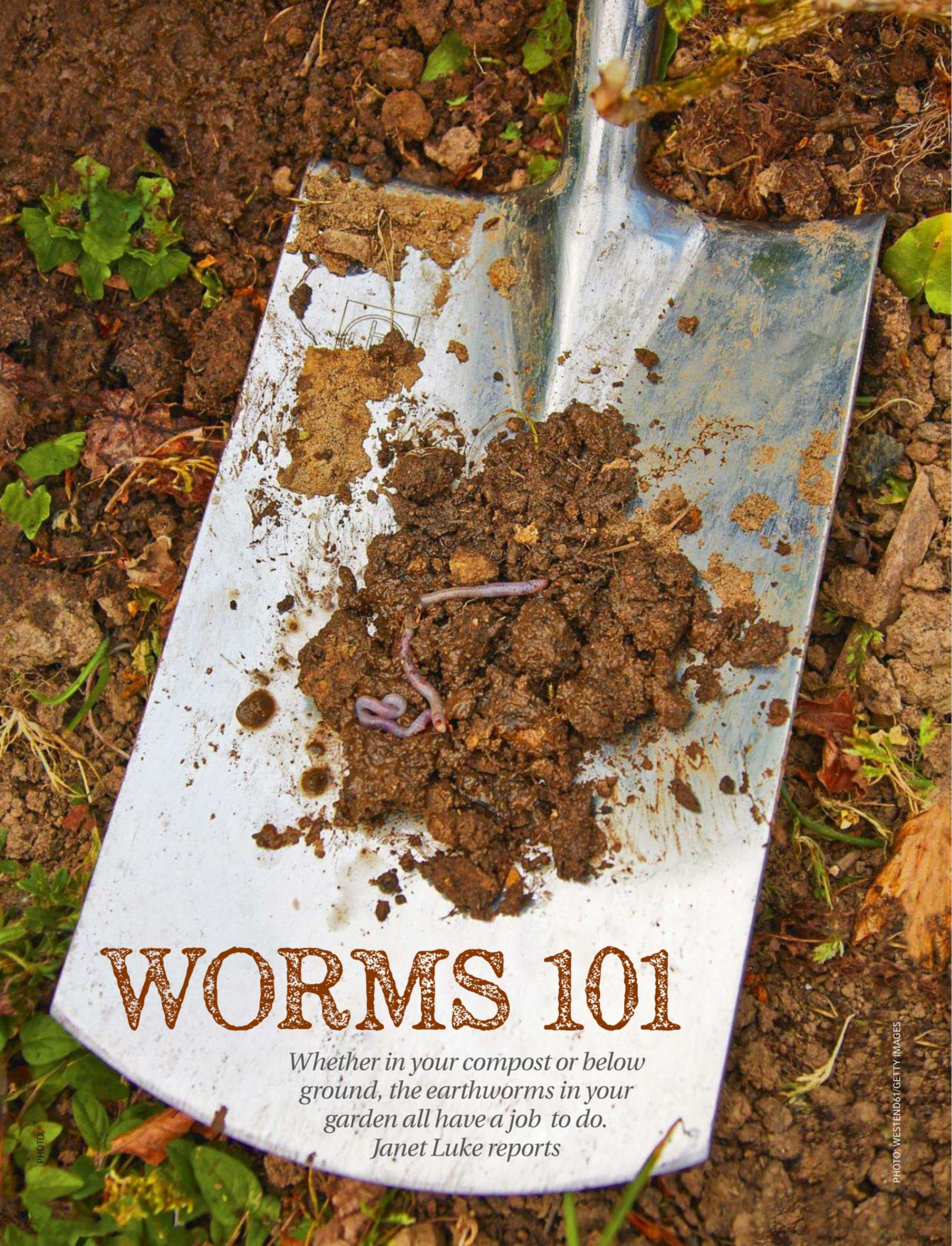
One to try: dandelion

It might be a weed, but dandelion leaves are chock full of vitamins and minerals, especially Vitamins A, C and K. According to wikipedia, “A cup of dandelion leaves contains 112 per cent daily recommended intake of Vitamin A, 32 per cent of Vitamin C, 535 per cent of Vitamin K, 218mg potassium, 103mg calcium and 1.7mg of iron. Dandelions are also an excellent source of Vitamin H, which is proven to aid in weight loss when ingested.”

The American Botanic Council backs that up: “A serving size of around one cup of fresh greens has the daily requirements of beta-carotene, calcium, iron and potassium. It contains more Vitamin A than any other green. It contains approximately 7000 units per ounce as compared to 1200 for lettuce and 1275 for carrots.

“Dandelions are great sources of magnesium, phosphorus, copper, sodium, choline, lecithin, biotin and inositol. In addition to being a very good source of dietary fibre, it is rich in Vitamin C, Vitamin D, Vitamin E, zinc and manganese. As a complete protein, dandelions contain all eight essential amino acids in addition to many of the B vitamins including B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B5, B6, B9 (folate) and B12.”

Dandelion leaves are best eaten raw to retain all their goodness. Try the American Botanic Council's recipe (above left) for fresh dandelion pesto. 🍀



WORMS 101

*Whether in your compost or below
ground, the earthworms in your
garden all have a job to do.
Janet Luke reports*



New Zealand has more than 200 species of earthworms – and scientists are still discovering new ones

GROW MORE WORMS

Here are some ways to encourage more earthworms into your garden.

- **Throw away the rotary hoe.**

Not only are you risking injury and burning fossil fuel, you could also be chopping up your favourite soil friends and compacting the subsoil. Instead, let the worms loosen your soil.

- **Get a soil test done.** If it is high in calcium your earthworms will be happy and get their groove on, reproducing in high numbers. Earthworms prefer a soil pH between 5.8 and 6.3.

- **Avoid certain fertilisers.** Ones that are high in ammonium will make soil acidic, which earthworms hate. Instead use natural fertilisers such as sheep pellets or blood and bone. Regular applications of lime is a good idea too.

- **Keep things moist.** Over summer, if you can responsibly irrigate and keep the top layer of soil moist, certain earthworms will remain active. Don't leave the sprinkler running too long though – if the soil becomes water-logged the worms will be flooded out of their burrows. They might then die in the heat or become a snack for birds.

- **Feed the worms.** Cover soil with pea hay, straw or fallen leaves. If you're not using part of your vegetable plot, plant a green manure crop to dig in come spring. Weed and clear out beds using the "chop and drop" method, and let the worms deal to them. Mow your lawn without the catcher and provide grass matter for the worms.

- **Don't use pesticides.** Some can cause severe reductions in resident earthworm numbers. As many worm species grow slowly and live several years, it can take a long time for them to recover. Pyrethrum-based sprays are better, but if you must apply pesticides, use spot applications and don't spray just after rain or watering as the worms could be near the soil surface.

The next time you are standing on your back lawn enjoying the feel of grass between your toes, take a moment to thank the little guys. Yes: all those thousands of slimy, slithering earthworms busy going about their business under your feet.

New Zealand has more than 200 species of earthworms, of which only 17 are introduced – and scientists are still discovering new ones. You read it here first: New Zealand has snakes! One native earthworm, *Spenceriella gigantea*, can grow up to 1.5m long. Imagine if you found that slithering among your broccoli. I, for one, would be hightailing it inside!

Native earthworms have been in New Zealand for around 65.5 million years and were once found all over the country. They evolved to thrive in particular ecosystems, be it in the kauri forests of Northland or in beech forests of the South Island. Since colonisation and the conversion to pastureland, these species have retreated to the remaining stands of native forest and areas where soil is undisturbed by farming. The Department of Conservation lists around 170 native species of earthworms as threatened or endangered but very little is known about them.

Earthworms were an important food source for early Maori, often reserved for chiefs. Even today this gourmet treat can be enjoyed at the Hokitika Wildfoods Festival. Luckily they are not our at-risk native worms, but the common introduced interlopers, which are the ones we see in the garden. These worms arrived in New Zealand by default. When European settlers brought



Aporrectodea caliginosa

over plants and shrubs their earthworms stowed aboard in the soil, and their large wooden sailing ships used dirt in the hulls as ballast too. When this was no longer needed it was off-loaded at ports around the country and worms

slithered happily into the newly broken-in land of smouldering tree stumps, bracken and freshly sown exotic pasture seed.

Early farmers quickly realised the benefits of earthworms and helped to spread them far and wide. These introduced earthworms did not threaten or displace the native worms as the natives could not survive in this new pastoral ecosystem. Perhaps this is one (and maybe the only) good story of an introduced species' impact on New Zealand.

Worms and soil

Dr Trish Fraser is a senior soil scientist with Plant & Food Research, based at Lincoln University in Canterbury. Her research looks at worms as an indicator of soil health, and how different ways of farming – the use of irrigation, fertilisers and tillage, for example – can affect soil.

So what's actually happening down there? Trish explains: "When worms consume soil it goes down to their gizzards, where it's ground up into smaller parts then excreted as castes that you sometimes see in the soil. This process releases nutrients into the soil (and the plant's roots) that were previously not available. In some instances it improves the structure of the soil too; as the worms pass through they create burrows, which improves drainage."

So why do worms matter?

All types of earthworms help increase beneficial bacteria and fungi in the soil. The more earthworms you have in your garden, the more beneficial bacteria and fungi, which help more nutrients to be released into the soil, which leads to healthy plant growth. Research in the Netherlands has indicated even an average presence of earthworms leads to a 25 per cent increase in crop production and 23 per cent more organic matter in the top soil.

So how can you tell how many earthworms you've got? A lot of people will go worm-spotting at the wrong time of year, says Trish. "You won't find many in the summer – it's too hot and too dry." This is when some worms are dormant; they burrow deep down, and you may find them when digging in deep soil, "They'll be all coiled up in knot, waiting for the rains to come again," she says. Other worm species don't have this ability, and instead leave their eggs behind ready to hatch

when conditions are more conducive. To assess the state of your garden worms, look for them instead in the middle of winter; July and August is when numbers are at their peak as it's cooler and wetter, so they're more active, says Trish.

The average garden has a number of different ecosystems in one small space. Lawns, ornamental beds, compost piles, worm farms and

vegetable gardens all provide habitats for different species of earthworms. Signs that you may not have a healthy population of earthworms could include animal manure or compost remaining on top of the soil; slow lawn growth; misshapen or stunted plant roots; water running over the surface of the soil; and defined layers of organic matter evident when you dig a hole.



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Composting and epigeic worms play a key role in breaking down organic matter for beneficial bacteria to feed on

Earthworm groups

Where the worms feed, and how they improve the soil depends on the species. "A lot of people make the mistake of thinking they should move the worms that live in their compost heap to their garden," says Trish. "But they don't like it – there's not enough organic matter; it's best to leave stripy red worms in compost and vice versa – soil worms like eating soil, and surface-dwellers like eating organic matter."

1 Compost earthworms

Are the species we populate our worm farms with or find in our compost. They need a high level of organic material and the habitat must stay moist year-round. These worms can consume their own body weight in food each day. They are ideal as a sustainable option for turning food waste and most paper waste into compost. They reproduce very quickly. These worms are relatively small in size and are bright red, often with thin stripes around their bodies.

2 Epigeic earthworms

Live on the surface of the soil under organic matter such as leaf litter and decaying plants. They feed on the leaf litter, turning it into friable soil. (You may notice that they have a darker body; this gives them protection from sun on the soil's surface.) They do not live in burrows so, like composting worms, they need year-round moisture to thrive. Both composting and epigeic earthworms play a critical role in breaking down dead organic matter. When they eat it, it is broken down into smaller pieces, enabling beneficial soil bacteria and fungi to feed on it and release nutrients back into the soil.

3 Endogeic earthworms

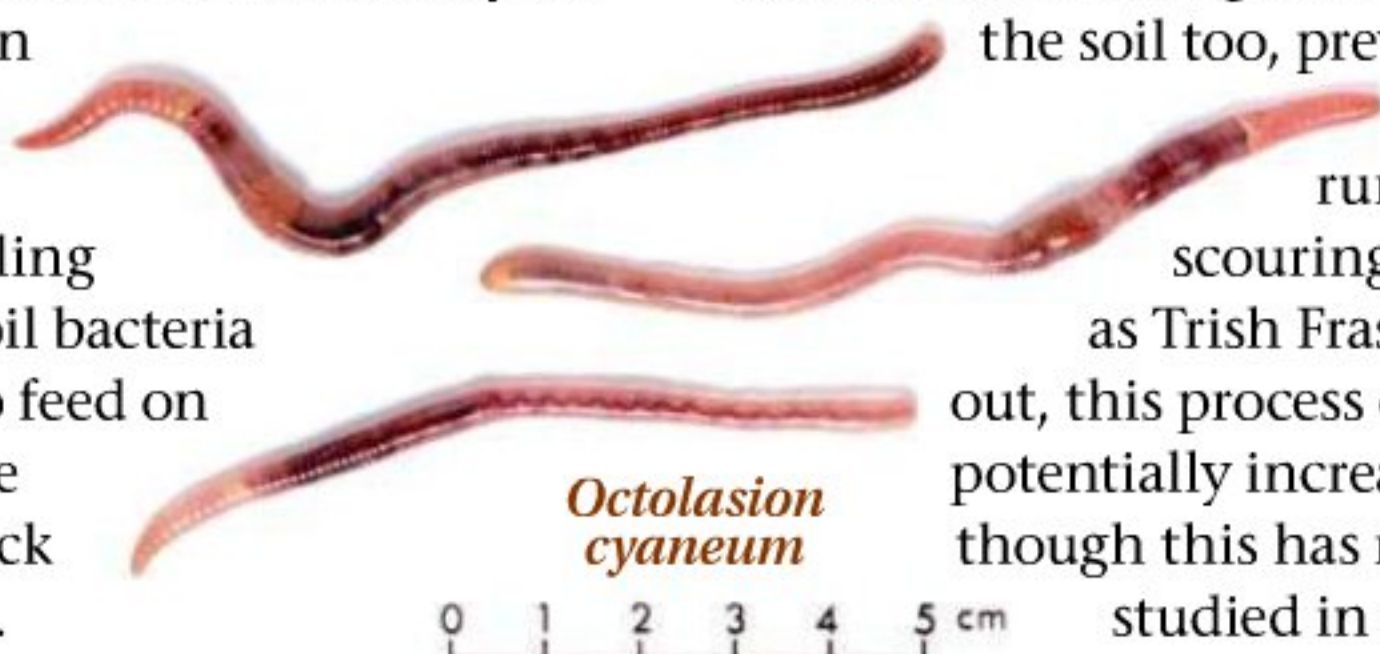
Are the ones we gardeners are most likely to come across. They live in the soil in horizontal burrows. Some are very pale in colour and I have come across some in my garden that are almost green. These worms benefit our gardens by creating an intricate web of hollow burrows in the soil, which allow oxygen and water to come in and carbon dioxide to get out. They also allow for better plant root penetration leading to more stable trees and nutrient availability to growing plants. And these earthworms' faeces – better known as castings – also help to create a fine, friable structure to the soil.

4 Anecic earthworms,

These, on the other hand, make vertical burrows in the soil. They source leaves and other organic matter from the surface and pull this into their burrows. As they feed on all this organic matter they excrete it as castings around the entrance to their burrows. If you have ever wondered where those small piles of soil that look like they've been squished out of a tiny tube of toothpaste and artistically mounded come from, the answer is anecic earthworms.

This is also the earthworm you may see slithering on paths after heavy rain – they have been washed out of their burrows. These earthworms are like little engineers, building passages which they use again and again, helping to take organic matter deep down below the top soil. Their vertical tunnels help rain to penetrate

the soil too, preventing water runoff and soil scouring. (Although, as Trish Fraser points out, this process could also potentially increase leaching, though this has not been studied in detail.)



Octolasion cyaneum

SIX GARDEN EARTHWORMS TO SPOT

• Grey worm

Aporrectodea caliginosa

Type/lives in/

eats: Endogeic; garden soil

Identify it: Pink-grey body, dark pink head, up to 15cm long.



• Blue-grey worm

Octolasion cyaneum

Type/lives in/

eats: Endogeic; topsoil, about spade depth

Identify it: Fat, blue-grey body; yellow tip on tail; yellow ring on neck.



• Tiger worm

Eisenia fetida

Type/lives in/

eats: Epigeic; organic matter; leaf litter and compost

Identify it: Bright red body with yellow stripes, up to 13cm long.



• Nightcrawler

Lumbricus terrestris

Type/lives in/eats:

Anecic; up to 3m deep in soil in North Island

Identify it: Very large (up to 30cm); red-brown body; flat tail.



• Dung worm

Lumbricus rubellus

Type/lives in/

eats: Epigeic; organic matter, especially cow pats

Identify it: Brown body, red saddle, 3-10cm long.



• Black-headed worm

Aporrectodea longa

Type/lives in:

Anecic; deep in soil mostly in North Island.

Identify it: Large (9-12cm); dark grey-brown body.



Worming chemicals are strong, but pass through an animal quickly or are diluted by the time you use the manure

Worms & manure

Many Kiwi gardeners have a source of animal manure, whether on their own property or a farm. But how does worming of cattle affect earthworms, and how long should you wait between the worming treatment and using the manure in your home garden? "The chances are that unless you are collecting the manure and using it on the same day as worming it will already have been diluted," says Trish. "Although they are quite strong chemicals, if you worm an animal, they pass through it quite quickly, and only remain in their system for a day or two. It's not a major issue."



Worm and castings

Earthworms are certainly not harmed by organic methods of agriculture, says Trish, "but some argue there are more earthworms under organic systems and current research doesn't bear that out. It depends on other farm practices, such as whether you use heavy machinery to till your soil. When you till the soil you cause organic matter to oxidise and when you lose organic matter, you're reducing the worms' food source in the soil."

It's not only worming that can affect the quality of manure. You should check what the animals have been eating too. "It all comes out the other end!" says Trish, "so animals fed on a low-nutrient diet will produce low-nutrient manure. You get what you pay for." ❀

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Passionvineoppers overwinter as adults. Look for them in old tomato debris, and squash them

It's the month when winter starts and we should all be doing a few crucial things for our garden: clean up, prevent and plan for next season. Yes, June is a pretty busy time, despite what you may think.

First of all, may I point you in the direction of the fabulous *NZ Gardener's Pruning Made Easy*. This was your first (but not necessarily your last) reminder. Pruning is not just essential for rejuvenating your trees and shrubs and getting copious amounts of the best fruit, it also helps to prevent pests for the next growing season. Citrus, especially in warmer regions, are often undermined by lemon tree borer activity; the grubs tunnel through branches and twigs, causing dieback and decline of your tree.

Now is the time to cut out the worst infestation. This is because pruning wounds are not in danger of egg-laying by female lemon tree borer during the cool winter months.

While you're at it, squirt some aerosol insecticides into the old borer holes of the main stem, trunk and remaining large branches. This will kill the overwintering larvae.

On a much smaller scale of pruning (and tidying up) is the removal of the thin twiglets and tendrils that harbour the overwintering eggs of passionvineopper. These Australian sucking bugs start life in November as "fluffy bums" and end up as lacy-wingedoppers that seem to have no moral compass when it comes to infesting gardens. A one-generation life cycle means that wholesale removal of the eggs in winter will put a serious dent in the population that emerges in spring. Think ahead!

Not many people realise that, unlike many invertebrates, those smelly green vegetable bugs (please don't call them beetles!) don't overwinter in the egg stage; they hide as adults in your garden. To make themselves a little bit more camouflaged they tend to take on a slightly brown-purple look.

Look for them in old tomato and bean debris. Squash them, as many as you can, for each adult will lay dozens of egg rafts in the spring foliage. And don't even think of putting old plants in the compost after suffering a summer of psyllid attacks. These destructive little bugs also overwinter on old crop debris and will survive a winter in the compost bin with ease. The green bin is the best place for them – let your service fry them to death in their commercial operations.

Ever wondered why you have these psyllids year after year on potatoes and tomatoes? Deadly nightshade and other solanaceous weeds are the perfect winter host for them, so: on your hands and knees, please!

Codling moths overwinter as pre-pupal caterpillars in a silk cocoon, usually in the nooks and cracks of your apple tree's bark. They change into a pupa in early spring and emerge as adult codling moths around the time apple flowering is finishing.

Some attach a collar of corrugated cardboard around an apple tree trunk to trap the autumnal codling caterpillars as they look for some cosy spot to spin their winter cocoon. Science has shown these contraptions to be a bit of a waste of time, but if you have hung one up, now is the time to remove it and trash it. But don't forget to look closely at the bark behind the cardboard collar and scrape out all the hibernating larvae left exposed.

Winter is the time to give the summer predators and parasitoids a home by stacking a good layer of mulch and compost on top of the soil and by honouring the lichen patches on your tree trunks, rocks and railway sleepers. It hides the most fearsome pest controllers you'll ever know.

Remove any fallen rose leaves, which bear spores for black spot, rust and downy mildew – and did I mention that *Pruning Made Easy*?

Oh my! Look at the time!

Happy winter solstice, everyone. ❀

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TAKE A SEAT

Rose Hughes sources and restores some cast iron to give a garden seat some gravitas



MATERIALS

You will need: Cast iron bench ends – I found mine on Trade Me • Hacksaw • Wire brush • Scrubbing brush / wire wool / sandpaper • Metal primer • Turpentine • Spray paint • 12 x 1200mm hardwood timber for new slats (if required) • Drill • Bolts and nuts – M5 x 40mm • Primer / sealer • Topcoat
Cost: \$250 (I paid \$135 for cast iron ends – prices vary on Trade Me)

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1 Remove all old bolts and hardware from the cast iron bench ends. You can try CRC or a similar product or use the hacksaw to cut through the bolts.

2 Assess the condition of the cast iron. If there is old peeling paintwork and rust present use a wire brush to remove. Thoroughly scrub with hot soapy water and dry well.

3 Undercoat with a suitable metal primer – I used Resene GP Metal Primer diluted down with turpentine to form a more liquid consistency. Ensure the coat is light and even. Allow to dry.

4 Set up the bench ends for spray-painting – if inside, line the area well with newspaper or drop cloths to limit the risk of overspray. Always use in a well-ventilated space. If outside, ensure you're out of the wind and away from anything

that might be damaged by overspray. Following the instructions on the spray can, carefully spray-paint both sides of the bench ends and allow to dry.

5 Cut timber slats to length (1200mm) if required. Mark and drill a hole at each end to match the holes in the cast iron ends. (I used an offcut of ply as a guide). Drill the holes. Sand the slats, prime and apply two topcoats. Allow to dry. (NB: If using Kwila for this project, allow the slats to weather first on a piece of grass to avoid staining your deck/path and the paint finish.)

6 Attach one slat on the seat and then slide the rest of the slats into position (it can become difficult to fit them into the frame once you have started assembling). Feed the bolts through the slats and the matching hole in the ends and tighten the nuts well. ❀



AUTUMN CIDER:

Pop quiz: how many manly roading contractors does it take to make 150 litres of organic, naturally fermented, additive-free 'Beurre Bosc' pear and 'Granny Smith' apple cider? My husband has surprised me this season, not just because of his sudden passion for scrumping, shredding, pressing, siphoning and bottling, but because his homemade cider has proved to be surprisingly palatable. Jason set out to make cider the old-fashioned way, using his late grandfather Fred's vintage wooden cider press (and a fair amount of gruntwork) to squeeze every drop of juice out of several wheelbarrowloads of fruit. The next time I roast a side of pork, I'll be able to serve it with lashings of cider gravy, which is lucky, as we're facing a serious apple sauce shortage. I only managed to put away half a dozen jars of 'Bramley' apple sauce before Jason raided my trees and juiced the rest of them.

June top & flop CROPS

*Lynda Hallinan's regular round-up
of the best & worst performers in
her Hunua garden*



TOP & FLOP CROPS



CHERRY GUAVAS: Rich in vitamin C and as prolific-fruiter as feijoas, cherry guavas (*Psidium littorale*) bridge the gap between autumn pipfruit and winter citrus. These small, slightly scrappy trees are hardy to -5°C and produce tangy, marble-sized fruit that ripens from late April until July (if the wood pigeons don't beat me to them all). Guavas make flavoursome jellies and cordials, or stew the fruit and sieve the pulp through a mouli to get all the seeds out, then combine with stewed apple in pies and shortcakes. My nieces, Grace and Jaime, are happy to scoff them fresh off the tree. "Does this count as scrumping or just stealing?" asked my sister when she sent me a photo of both girls up my guava tree in Tairua, feasting and foraging.



'TOP CROP' BEANS: I was still picking dwarf green beans in May (from a January sowing).



'DETROIT DARK RED' BEETROOT: I am convinced that beetroot thrives on neglect.

Provided you have fertile, free-draining soil that has been forked over prior to direct sowing, you can simply sprinkle the seeds and wait 8-10 weeks to dig them up. I have much more success with autumn beetroot (sown in summer) than summer beetroot (sown in spring). Not only is soil moisture more consistent in autumn, there's less competition from other crops in my veg patch, as those triffidy tomatoes and courgettes have been consigned to the compost heap by the time the beetroot starts to swell.



YAMS: Many gardeners are guilty of habitually overfertilising their veg plots, resulting in brassicas with metre-wide leaves or potatoes that are all talk and no tubers. Not me. Applying fertiliser is one of those jobs, like regularly pruning lavender to prevent it getting woody, that I am remiss in getting around to each season – and that has led to an ever-diminishing yield of yams. When I first moved to Hunua, my yams (pictured above) were as big as their commercially grown counterparts, but now their tubers are so tiny that it's hardly worth the effort of scrubbing them clean to eat. The time has come for fresh seed stock, and a generous sprinkling of general garden fertiliser, I think.

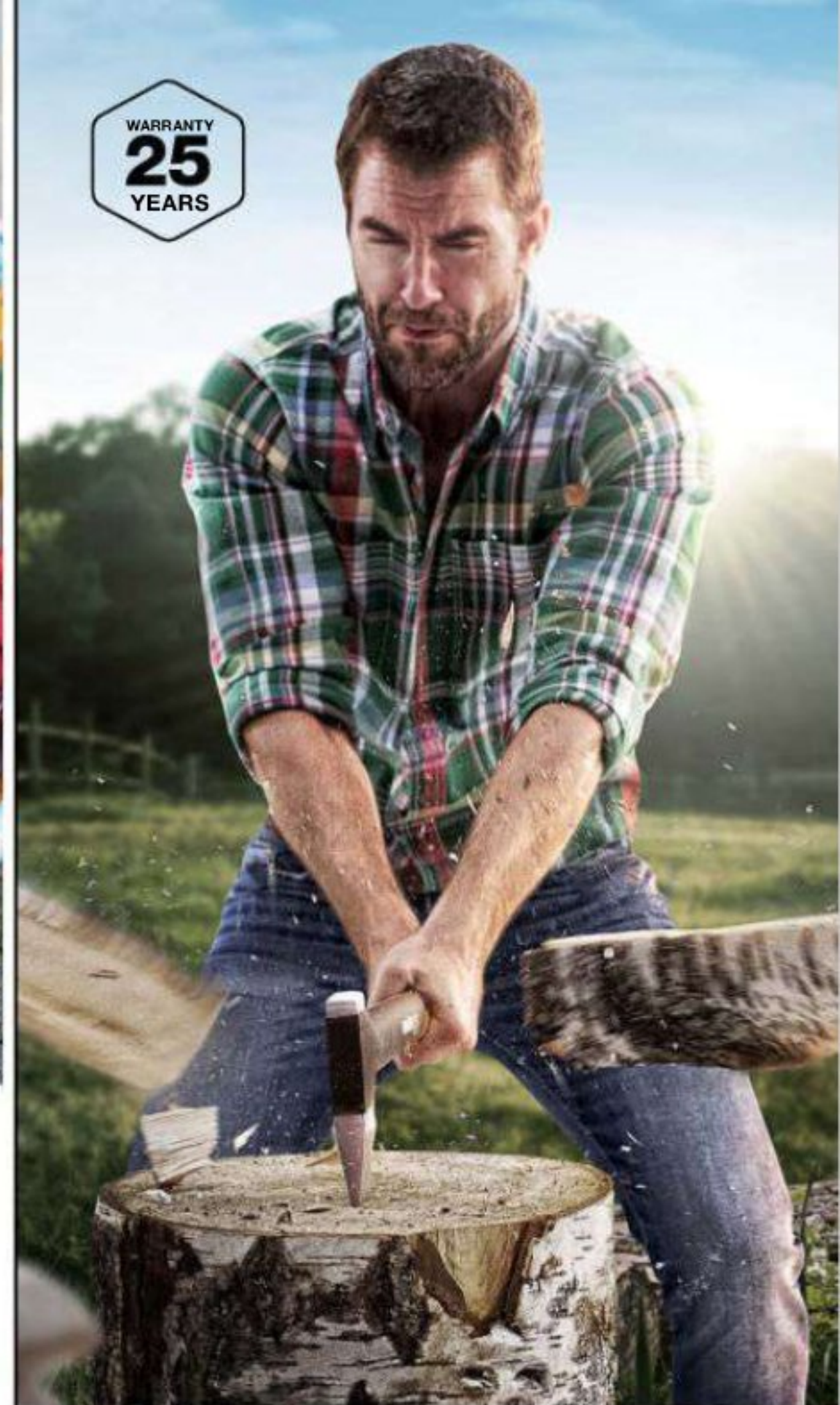


GRAPEFRUIT: There's only one fruit on my 'Cutler's Red' tree this year (down from three last year). Mind you, that's at least one more than on the 'Satsuma' mandarin planted next to it, which is completely barren. Both trees are planted in the shadow of a horse chestnut, which I suspect is behaving like a bad neighbour, robbing them of nutrients.



RABBITS: I'm sad to say that my rabbit problem is no closer to resolution, though the dog is at least taking chase when I start gesturing wildly. Rabbits have now eaten all the flowers off my chrysanthemums, all my winter kale, the silverbeet and spinach, and most of my lettuces. On the plus side, I'm rapidly learning which crops are rabbit-proof. They have, for instance, no interest in rhubarb or broad beans. ❀

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OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:
Heather Cole, Russell Fransham, Kate Marshall

Ask an expert

FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE THIS MONTH

Q PICKING OLIVES
This is the first year my olives have produced a crop large enough to make use of. How can I tell when the olives are ripe though? I would like to get to them before the birds polish them off.

SARLA PATEL,
WELLINGTON

A Our Nelson columnist, Heather Cole from Country Trading, has a small olive grove and has experimented with brining her crop and making her own olive oil.

Heather says olives can be picked at different stages depending on what they'll be used for. Harvest olives for oil when one third of the fruit are green, a third are

"turning" and a third are black.

Harvest for pickling when they're either green or black – depending on the variety and the flavour you want in the olive – but don't pick before late May to early June.

Olives look ripe a long time before they actually are. Check ripeness by cutting a couple in half. Black olives should be black all the way through. Green olives go a lighter straw colour inside when fully ripe.

Place a tarpaulin under the tree and pick the olives off by hand. If you've got several trees or the olives are out of reach, try an olive rake. These specially made rakes have soft plastic fingers or tines that pull off the olives without damaging the trees. They're available from countrytrading.co.nz.

Barbara Smith

A KEI APPLES
We grew a male and a female kei apple trees because we thought both were needed for pollination. The female fruited well but was damaged and had to be cut back. To our surprise the male fruited for the first time. What happened?
TREVOR CROSBY, AUCKLAND

A Both trees must be female. The kei apple, *Dovyalis caffra* is dioecious with separate male and female plants. However, I have several female kei apple plants and for several years had no male plant yet the females still all fruited quite well, producing tasty orange fruit without seed. If the fruit were left to fully ripen so there were no green dots in the skin, the flavour was very pleasant and not at all tart.

If a male is present the fruit have flattened white seeds. Perhaps a male is not necessary (or desirable) considering the unfertilised fruit is equally tasty to eat.

The New Zealand form of the so-called tropical apricot, *Dovyalis hebecarpa* x *abyssinica* (a hybrid), is also parthenocarpic, producing only female flowers, yet each produces an unpollinated, seedless fruit. This hybrid fruits repeatedly through the year with reddish-orange, tart, intensely flavoured fruit that is especially tasty in summer and autumn, but the winter fruit are tart to the point of bitterness. At that time of year they are still very useful for chutney, sauce and jam.

Russell Fransham





Q WHICH IS WHICH?

Please explain the different sorts of cranberries growing in New Zealand. I thought I was growing the sort that Americans use for Thanksgiving cranberry sauce but they don't look like the ones in the cranberry story in the May NZ Gardener.

MICHELLE HARRIS, TAURANGA



Dianne Sheaf from Wild Ruby Cranberries near Greymouth grows the true American cranberry, *Vaccinium macrocarpon* (pictured above right). She says people often tell her they grow cranberries too, when they're really growing a completely unrelated plant, marketed as "NZ Cranberry". This is actually a Chilean guava (above left). It doesn't help that it has two botanical names; *Myrtus ugni* was reclassified as *Ugni molinae* but the old name is still the one most commonly used on garden centre labels.

Dianne says the difference is that the American cranberry is a spreading groundcover with large, tart berries, while the Chilean guava is a low-growing bush with small sweet berries.

Chilean guavas can be clipped as a hedge. They are easy to grow in most conditions throughout New Zealand. The small, tasty fruit can be eaten straight from the bush.

True cranberries like free-draining soil with a pH between 4.5 and 5.5 and growing temperatures less than 25°C. The fruit is very strong and tart. Try them juiced, dried or added to baking or fruit teas.

Barbara Smith



Q PEST BEETLES

Our 'Blackboy' peaches were infested with small, brown, very mobile, 2-3mm beetles or weevils tunnelling inside and running about on the outside. The peaches were quite rotten. What are they and how can I prevent this happening again?

LORRAINE EDWARDS, POINT WELLS



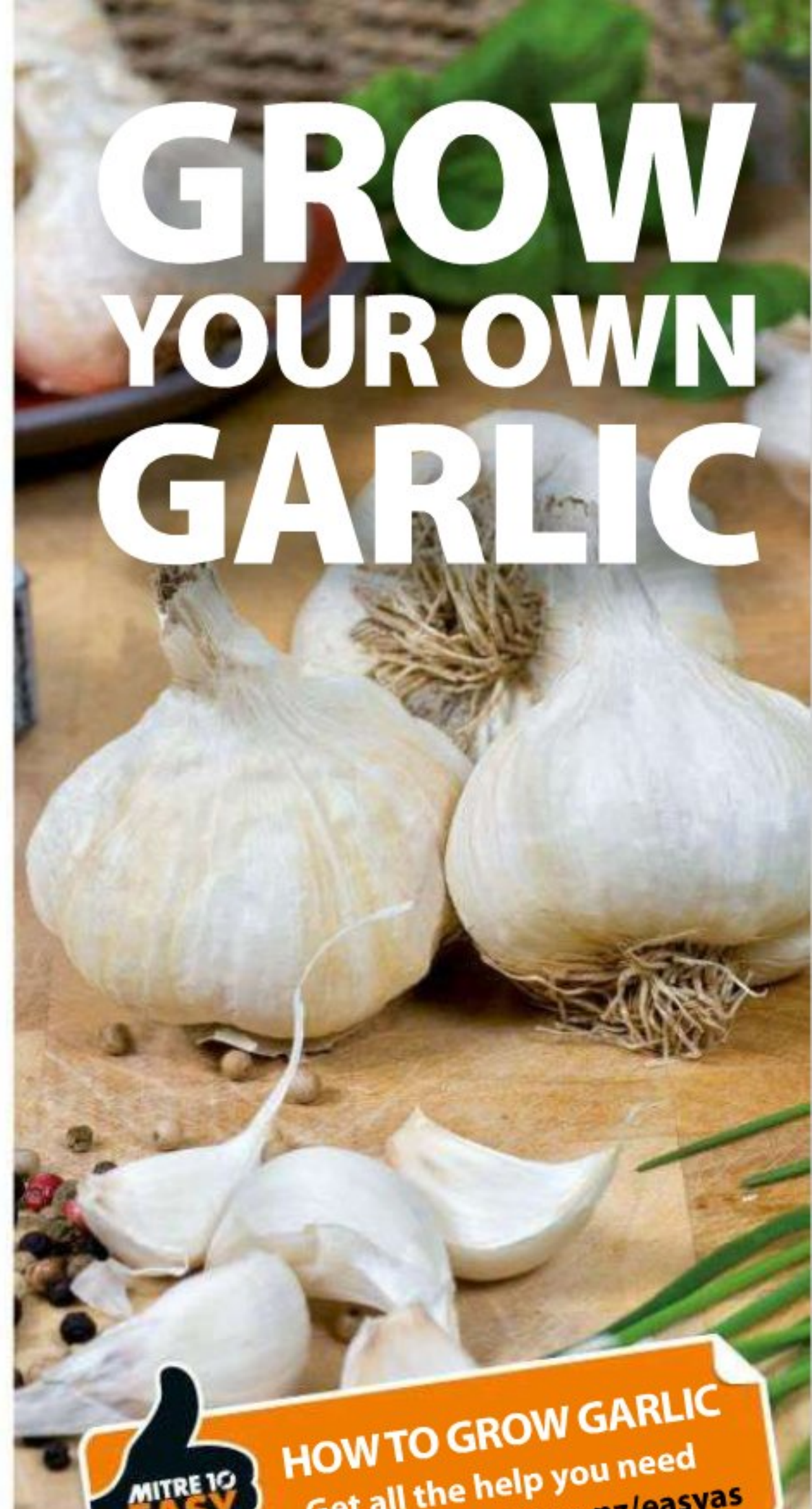
Kate Marshall from Waimea Nurseries identified these pests as *Carpophilis* beetles, which chew holes in many types of ripe fruit and spread brown rot spores. Populations are highly mobile and flock to wherever there's a supply of ripe fruit. They are an economic pest as numbers can increase rapidly in an orchard. The beetles move to different crops as they ripen.

Carpophilis beetles don't necessarily crop up in the same place each year. The best method of control is to keep them away by making your garden less attractive. Their main food source is rotting fruit so keeping the area clean will reduce the chance they'll make your place home. Remove thinned fruit and windfalls and avoid leaving over-ripe fruit on the trees.

Chemical control is difficult because *Carpophilus* beetles are very mobile and they're hard to access as they feed inside fruit. Also, they infest ripe fruit so withholding periods need to be monitored carefully if you decide to spray. An alternative strategy would be to pile damaged fruit well away from the target tree. Rotting fruit will attract *Carpophilus* and the piles can be sprayed with insecticide.

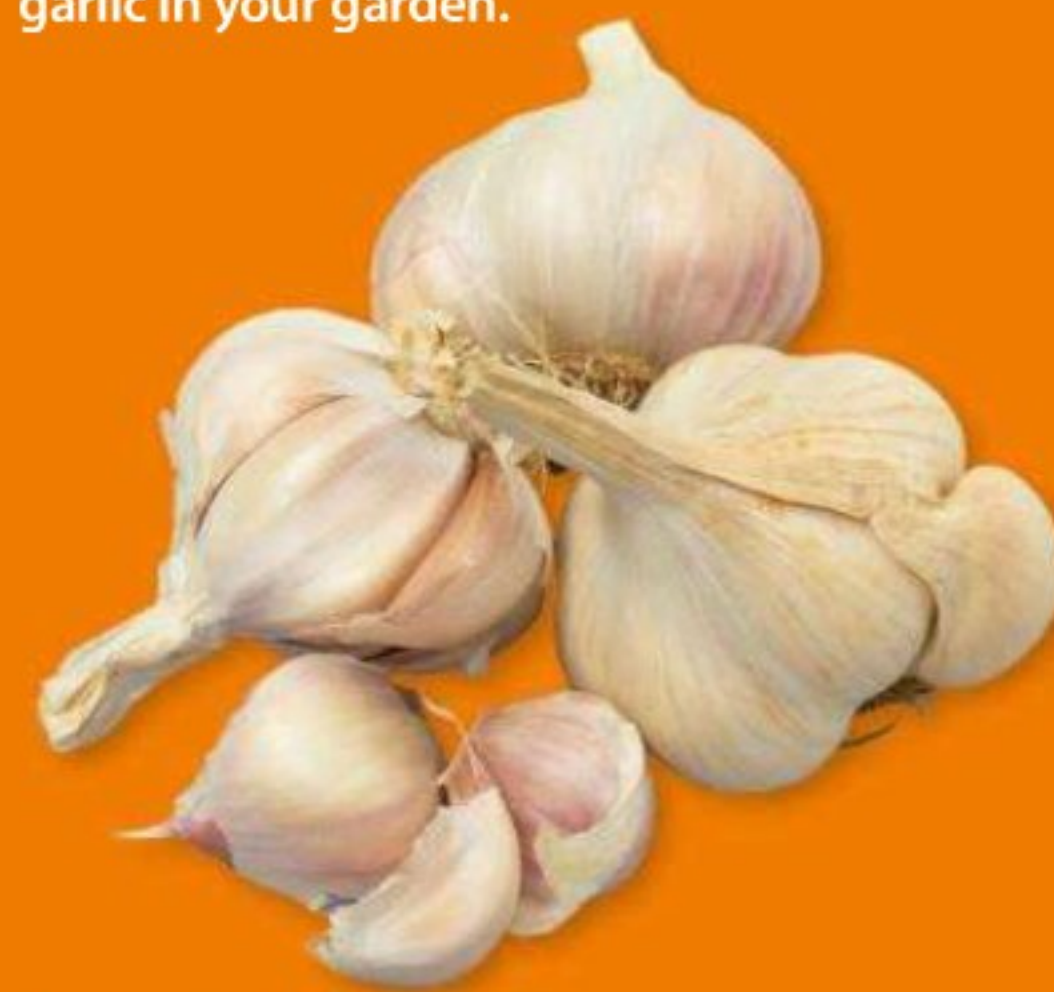
Barbara Smith

GROW YOUR OWN GARLIC



HOW TO GROW GARLIC
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Garlic is easy to grow and a great flavour to add to your cooking. This month is when it should be planted, and it'll be ready to harvest in summer. Check out our Mitre 10 Easy As guide to get started on growing garlic in your garden.



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MITRE 10

DIY PRESERVE

Candied nuts

These caramelised treats are totally addictive



GET YOUR SUGAR FIX and a healthy dose of Omega 3 at the same time with these yummy sweets. You can use any nuts you have to hand. Take about 1½ cups of nuts and roast them in an oven at 180°C until light brown. In a heavy-based saucepan, heat ½ cup of sugar on medium without stirring. You can tilt or gently shake the pan to mix the melting sugar, but take care not to let it burn! Once the caramel is golden brown, mix in the nuts, then quickly tip onto a tray lined with greaseproof paper, separating any that are stuck together. Store the candied nuts in an airtight container.

PHOTO: SPÖRRER/SKOWRONEK/STOCKFOOD/ONESHOT.CO.NZ

PEOPLE & PLANTS

A kaleidoscope of colour in Madge Snow's Wanaka garden





This page: Tree ferns provide dappled shade and shelter for young palms
Opposite: Fruiting and foliage trees, including bamboo, cherimoya, oak leaf and red leaf pawpaw, make an intriguing foliage combination



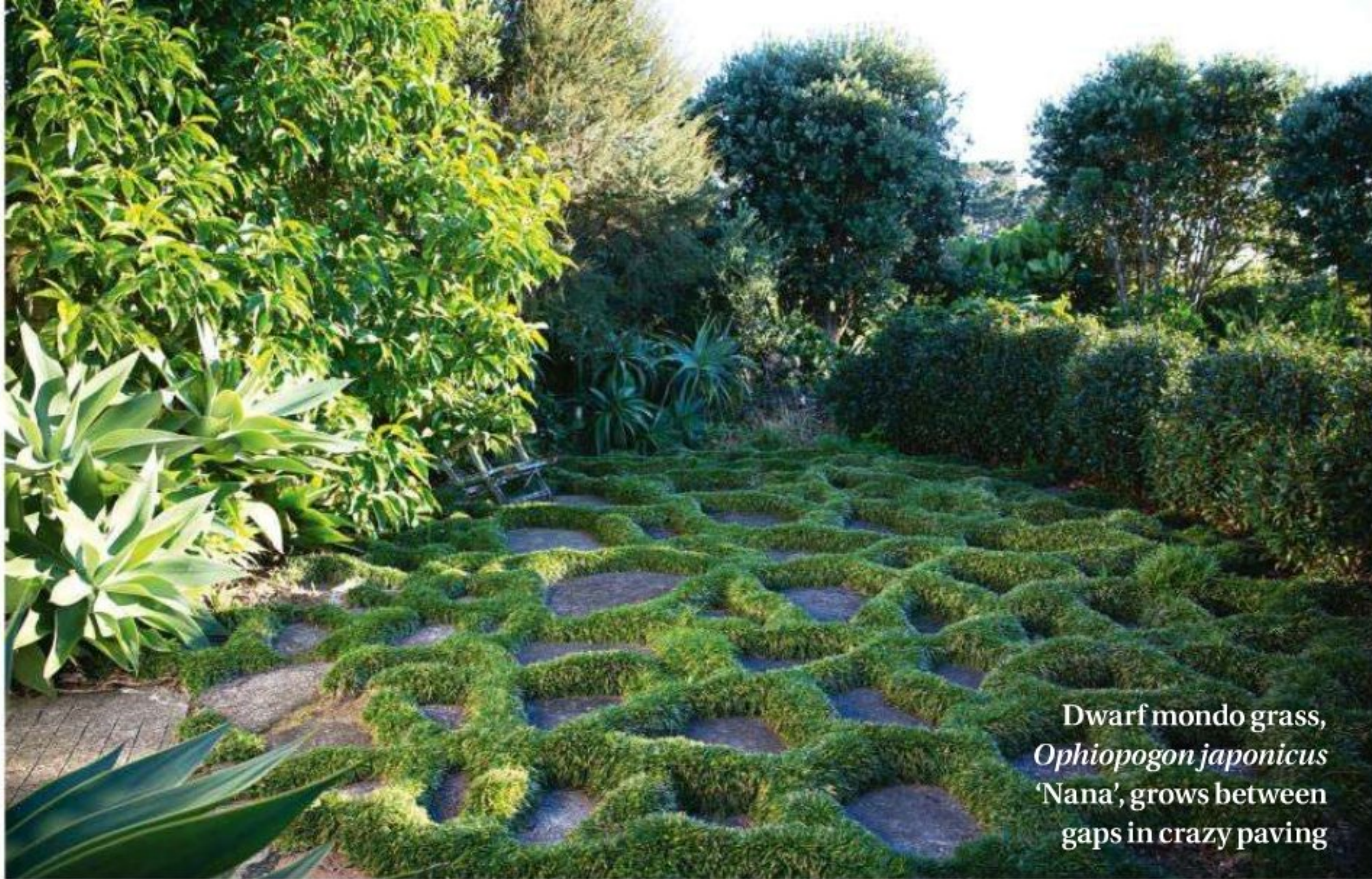
top of the tree

Legendary plantsman Peter Cave may have taken a break from the nursery scene but his love of plants is still growing and thriving

STORY: JULIAN MATTHEWS
PHOTOS: TESSA CRISP



Peter Cave at the entrance to his orchard, which provides a free-range environment for his happy hens. The frame for the gate was rescued from the local tip



Dwarf mondo grass,
Ophiopogon japonicus
'Nana', grows between
gaps in crazy paving

"I reckon there was a sudden alteration in interest with the next generation who became preoccupied with vegetable gardening and going to cafes"

What's become of Peter Cave?' is a question plant connoisseurs have been asking themselves since he closed the gate to his iconic Waikato mail order tree nursery seven years ago and seemingly disappeared.

Some said he'd retired to Raglan where he was living the simple life, growing his own vegetables and windsurfing for days on end, heading off on adventurous overseas trips during the winter. Which wasn't too far from the mark, but as always with such stories there's much more to tell.

Peter says he hadn't expected that he would call a halt to his nursery operation as soon as he did, but fashions changed. His loyal clientele reached an age where they were retiring from their farms and large gardens and this resulted in demand for his special trees declining markedly. "I reckon there was a sudden alteration in interest with the next generation who became preoccupied with vegetable gardening and going to cafés rather than looking to long-term tree planting," he says.

Closing the nursery did have a silver lining though. It offered the freedom to travel, to places such as Tibet and Turkey. He seldom stayed in hotels, which he considers a boring means of accommodation, preferring to go on rugged tours where evenings are spent around campfires swapping yarns with fellow adventurers. He's been a keen tramper since his youth and even got to Everest base camp on one trip, but he's not interested in mountain climbing these days. "I did that technical climbing stuff when I was in my early twenties and was even intending to climb Mount Cook with four mates. But I was offered work at Monrovia Nurseries in California, which I was really keen

to do, so I headed there instead while my friends went up the mountain and they all perished in a storm. That put an end to my mountaineering interests."

Peter had owned land at Raglan for a few years before he closed the nursery. To begin with he was there primarily for the windsurfing, which he describes as the perfect sport for unwinding as one is often too scared to think of anything else! But he also did a bit of "casual planting". This mainly involved shelter plantings as the site was exposed and the winds blew hard and often.

He used Mexican alder, *Alnus jorullensis*, spacing the trees about 10 metres apart. It's the best thing he found for use as a windbreak and in the comparatively mild coastal climate is just about evergreen. It acts as a nurse crop for less robust plants and is removed as other things establish.

Once the shelter trees were doing their stuff Peter began planting some of the more tender shrubs and trees that needed to be kept in a glasshouse over winter at the inland Waikato nursery. These included the five yellow camellia species he had collected in Vietnam on an early plant-collecting trip and brought into New Zealand before the restrictions on plant importations were introduced.

"It was wonderful seeing them in the wild. They're a whole different race of camellias, with waxen buds and dark green, bubbly leaves. As with so many subtropical plants, they need watering in summer to thrive. Not a trickle with an automatic irrigation system either, which can be disastrous as it encourages surface roots, rather a soaking for hours with a sprinkler when there's been no rain for a while," he advises.



Seedling natives



Dracaena draco



Plant books by Vonnie Cave, Peter's mum



Native plants in the nursery



Phormium tenax 'Goliath'

Bamboos were planted early on for shelter and filtered light to some extent, but mainly because Peter adores them. "I just like the effect, of morning light on the canes, the way the tops dance in the wind, and their very tall and slender look, which is so dramatic."

He's well aware that some bamboos can be a pest, but keeps his under control by digging perimeter trenches. The fat, soft, new shoots of the big, green-stemmed *Phyllostachys edulis* bamboo sometimes provide him with a nutty-flavoured food. The trick is to peel away the outer bits until the stem is all white, then chop them up and stir-fry them with a splash of soy sauce.

The bamboos provide necessary shade for hybrid clivias, "the best possible thing for under-storey planting, always reliable, extremely drought-tolerant, great foliage, and a huge burst of flowers in spring."

The red and yellow berries are a feature of the clivias too, but they get little chance to provide their usual long season of colour. Peter harvests them as soon as they ripen to send to Browns' Nursery, exchanging them for some of their extensive range of vireya rhododendrons, which are among his favourite plants. He's especially fond of the older variety 'Tropic Glow', which puts on a display of its glowing orange flowers several times a year.

He has success with the vireyas by planting them in lots of potting mix to provide them with improved drainage as there's a bit of a clay underlay to his sandy soil. In summer he makes sure they don't dry out, another important aspect of growing them successfully. He finds they will grow in full sun, providing they don't dry out in summer, but rather than battle nature when droughts occur he positions them in light shade where they are quite happy without extra watering.

Monarch butterflies abound – Peter has planted lots of nectar-rich flowers and every year he raises hundreds of swan plants so there's never a shortage of food for their caterpillars. Among the monarchs' favourite flowers are single dahlias and *Escallonia bifida*, which, when it blooms in early autumn will often have 300-400 monarchs in close attendance.

Peter planted masses of swan plants in the neighbours' property last year, adjacent to where a summer wedding was to take place, and on the day there were lots of monarchs flying just above the guests.

Fragrance is a feature of the garden. *Calliandra portoricensis* is one of the best, the powder-puff white flowers produced afresh each day, hundreds at a time. The sweet, "dreamy" scent is especially noticeable in the evenings. Peter has his calliandra beside the little cottage that he rents out and it's a great hit with tenants, as are the lush grounds and the abundant feijoas.

A full-page photograph of a man walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a lush garden. On the left, a large, mature tree with a thick trunk and dense green foliage stands prominently. To the right, a dense grove of tall, slender bamboo stalks reaches towards the sky. In the foreground, a large, weathered log lies horizontally on the ground. The man, wearing a blue jacket and light-colored trousers, is walking towards the background where more greenery and a fence are visible. Sunlight filters through the leaves, creating a dappled light effect on the path and the bamboo. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Peter loves his grove of big bamboo,
Phyllostachys edulis, for its slender
stems, dramatic height and filtered
light. On a windy day the swaying
tops add to the interest and the new
growths sometimes provide
a stir-fried culinary treat



Osmanthus fragrans aurantiacus



Dahlia coccinea



Lobelia aberdarica



Lotus leaves



Vitex triloba 'Purpurea'

Other sweet-smelling flowers include *Osmanthus fragrans* 'Aurantiacus', with bright orange flowers bearing a strong scent that reminds Peter of orange jelly crystals. (Others say the fragrance is like ripe apricots.) He saw a lot of this shrub in Asia where it's often planted around temples.

Peter's garden philosophy is to plant boldly and densely, then thin later on. "So many gardeners are tentative, afraid that something might get out of control at a later stage, which makes for two-dimensional plantings." He also plants in big groups of one species, which adds to the wow-factor. While colour isn't a major consideration he does like to play with red and green combinations, as anyone who saw his grouping of the bold green leaves of *Lobelia aberdarica* with the burgundy foliage of loropetalums in the garden at his old nursery will well remember.

In recent years Peter has been carrying out a reforestation project for a nearby landowner. He was asked to undertake the restoration of 24 hectares of difficult, steep, grass-covered hillsides to the sort of native forest it would have been in pre-European times. He has collected seed of 60 different native species from local forests, and has turned the open central area of his garden into a nursery.

Around 15,000 trees have been planted every year since he began and this season will see the project completed. He has a team to help with the planting and despite the complaints at the start of each winter season he finds that by the end of planting, the young guys are really enjoying it. "Some say they've lost five kilos and it's great for their fitness training and can they please come back again next year!"

Now that the mass production and planting of native trees is coming to an end, Peter is considering his next move. First up is more overseas travel, of the usual adventurous kind. He's going to fly to Kenya later in the year, where he will join an Intrepid Travel trip that will see him spend 44 days on the road, travelling north to Ethiopia. Although the primary focus won't be plants, he's keenly anticipating seeing some of the giant African lobelias in their native habitat, including the gorgeous *Lobelia aberdarica* growing on the slopes of Mount Kenya. It was a star among the specialty plants he used to sell from the Waikato Nursery.

When he's settled at home again the plan is to start propagating and then, in a year or two, selling special plants via the internet. It's an idea that is bound to excite those who love architectural and unusual plants and will also put him in touch with all those loyal customers from the past who have been missing him so. 🍀



Colletia cruciata



Manihot palmata



Hibiscus diversifolius



Ficus rumphii



Hebe speciosa



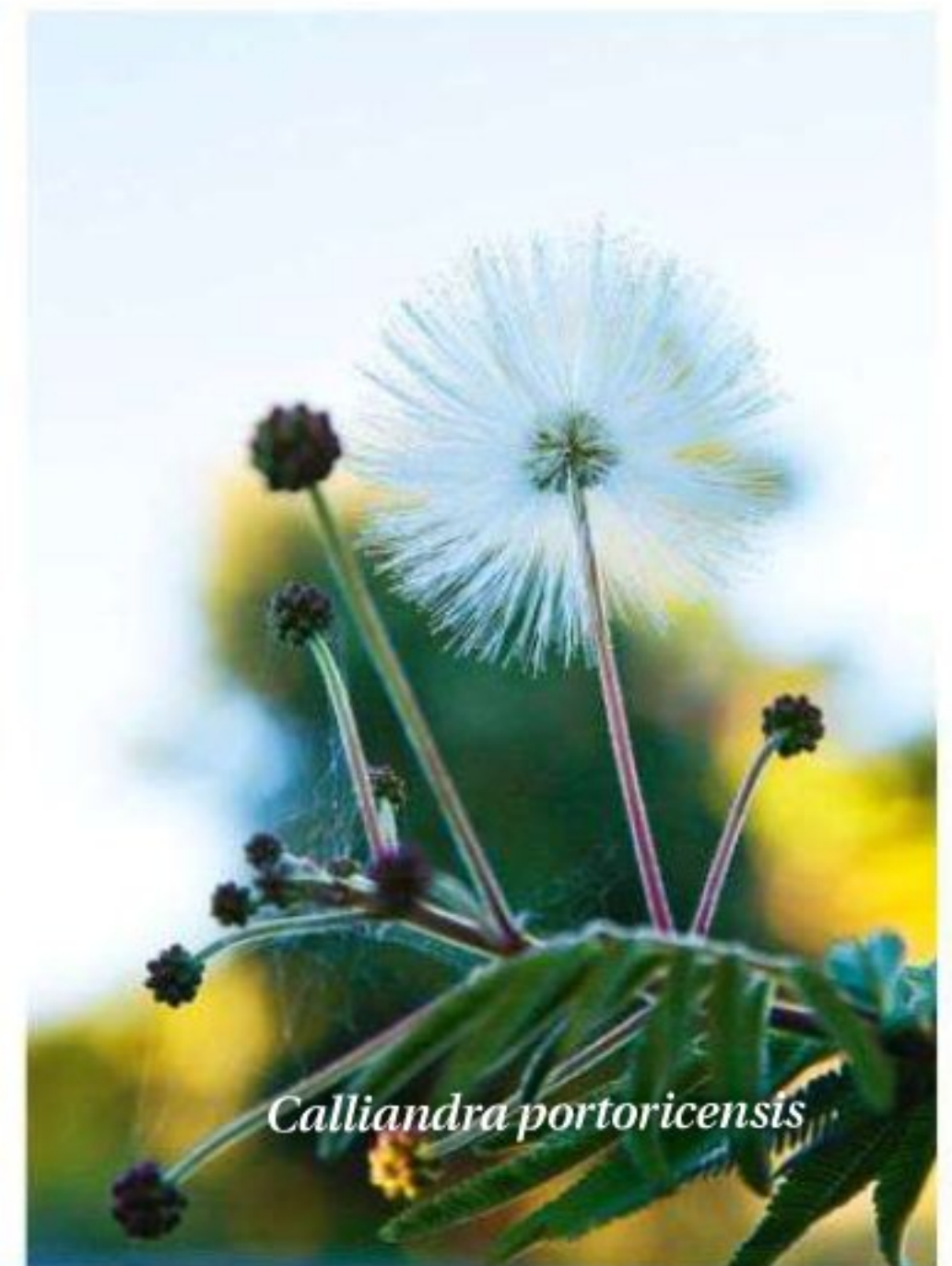
Strobilanthes gossypinus



Hibiscus richardsonii



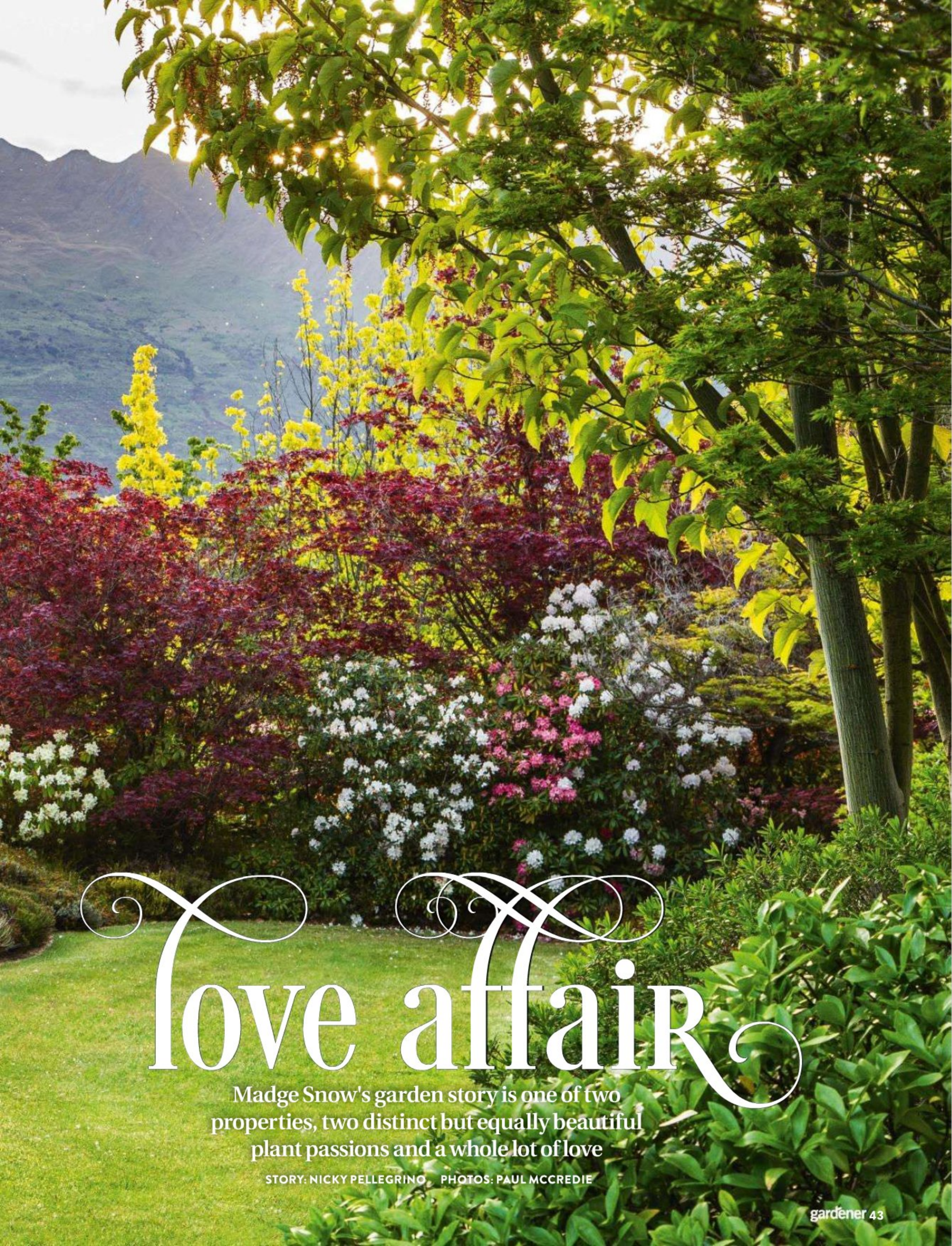
Oreopanax capitatus



Calliandra portoricensis

SOUTH ISLAND

The middle lawn with Mt Roy in the background, a bed of heathers on the left, a group of rhododendrons from the Seven Dwarfs series at the bottom and maple variety *Acer hersii* on the right



love affair

Madge Snow's garden story is one of two properties, two distinct but equally beautiful plant passions and a whole lot of love

STORY: NICKY PELLEGRINO PHOTOS: PAUL MCCREDIE

Madge with her brown
shaver hens looking at the
view from the top garden
through an avenue of
rhododendrons and
camellias, which she
calls "the long walk"





The views through the long walk over Lake Wanaka with *Rhododendron* 'Kings Party Dress' (left) and 'Anna Rose Whitney' (right)

"The garden is my life," she says. "If I'm not in it I'm reading a gardening book. All my friends are going into retirement homes but I can't leave. It's part of me"

The word Madge Snow uses most often is "love".

The 84-year-old has loved her life; loved her travels to far-flung places; loved her husband and family; loved her years as matriarch of a high country farm, Morven Hills; and loved the mountains.

One of Madge's most enduring loves is gardening. Every morning she walks over her Wanaka property to see what needs to be done, and she can easily spend the whole day out there pottering.

"The garden is my life," she says. "If I'm not in it I'm reading a gardening book. All my friends are going into retirement homes but I can't leave. It's part of me."

Madge found her passion for plants as a young wife on Morven Hills Station where she started from scratch, transforming a bare paddock. Located high up on Lindis Pass, conditions were harsh, freezing cold in winter, exposed and with little rainfall, but Madge stumbled across the perfect plant when a neighbour sent her home from a visit clutching a sugar bag full of iris rhizomes.

"From then on I really went overboard with irises," she recalls. "In the Lindis they grow prolifically and I liked that there was no need to fuss over them, deadheading and spraying. I don't know how many varieties I had because I never counted. You don't go round counting, you just look at them and think how beautiful they are."

In 1982, Madge and her (now late) husband Max said goodbye to Morven Hills Station, handing it over to their son Richard, and retired to a new home in Wanaka. There was a pang or two at leaving behind the garden. "But you can't look back," says Madge, who is a great believer in the power of attitude. "You've got to look forward. And my daughter-in-law has taken it over and is doing a great job."

In Wanaka she got busy establishing her second garden. Initially she and Max had two acres, but then bought another two from a neighbouring farmer when it became clear the town was creeping closer. With views over Mt Roy, Black Peak and Treble Cone, it is a beautiful spot. However, Madge's beloved irises weren't quite so fond of it.

"They flower but don't do as well here as they did in the Lindis where it's a lot drier," she explains.

A pragmatic gardener, Madge quickly transferred her affections to a plant more suited to the conditions.

"After irises I had a love affair with heathers," she says. "Fortuitously, around the time we retired, I discovered a book, *Heathers in Colour* by Brian and Valerie Proudley. Valerie explained how easily grown they were. It was a very quick conversion. I wanted a heather garden!"

Beginning at the street frontage, she and Max planted the first bed then, year by year, put in more, planting in groups of five of the same variety to give areas of bold colour, and a mix of winter and summer flowering.

"Heathers are very forgiving and they thrive in a great variety of soil," says Madge. "They do like moisture though and here in Central Otago I find they can be quite stressed if we have dry seasons."

In late summer she loves *Calluna vulgaris* 'H.E. Beale' and *Calluna vulgaris* 'Elsie Purnell', a froth of pink with very long stalks. She grows *Erica cinerea* 'Golden Drop' for its foliage, which can brighten a dull corner any month of the year. Madge also likes the *Erica carnea* group for its coloured foliage and favourites are 'Ann Sparkes' and 'Foxhollow', which have been planted in great swathes. 'Pink Spangles', 'Springwood Pink', 'Springwood White', and 'Myretoun Ruby' flower into winter.



Madge's colourful trees include *Liquidambar acalycina*, *Acer palmatum 'Purpurea'*, *Acer psuedoplatanus 'Worleei'* and *Acer senkaki*

Others she especially likes are the silver grey *Erica x darleyensis* 'Silberschmelze' and the golden yellow *Erica vagans* 'Valerie Proudley'.

She doesn't pamper her heathers any more than she did her irises. There is no mollycoddling with special nutrients and as the seedheads die off in spring and autumn they are trimmed with a weed eater.

"It sounds brutal but it's important or they'd become straggly, ungainly plants," she explains. "And doing it in one whack is fine.

I always say, 'don't make them flat. I want them like ladies lying on their backs,

with nice curves'. That gives the beds a lovely wave effect."

In the early years Max did a lot of the heavier work, digging holes and bringing in sheep manure. Nowadays Madge wouldn't be able to maintain the garden without some support. Her regular helper Lyn Key comes for two hours a week, Lyn's husband Rod is in charge of the weed eater and Madge's son Peter, who lives on the property, does the lawns and hauls away the garden waste.

"Come May the entire garden is mulched with pea straw. The birds tend to scatter it and some days it looks quite messy but it keeps the weeds down," says Madge. "The garden is grown up now and kind of easy care. I think gardens are very like children, if you get them through the difficult years suddenly it's easier."

Rabbits continue to be the main threat to her plants. "I see them every day from my kitchen window, popping out of the heather. I'll never get rid of them."

Although it can be a blustery spot, particularly the back section, the maple trees Madge put in are thriving and she is quite convinced that anything that has been grown from seed acclimatises and has no problem with the wind.



House from cherry corner, overlooking a heather bed

Madge is convinced that anything grown from seed acclimatises and has no problem with the wind



Clematis 'Multi Blue'



Acer purpurea



Cornus kousa



Acer 'Esk Flamingo'



Erica cinerea
'Golden Drop'



Erica carnea
'Springwood Pink'



Erica carnea
'Pink Spangles'



Erica vagans
'Valerie Proudley'



Erica carnea
'Myretoun Ruby'

Only deciduous trees are welcome on this property. "I dislike natives," Madge says. "In gardens they're boring. I think we should grow things for colour so my garden features mainly maples and cornus trees, which provide a rainbow of colour in spring and again in autumn."

The roses she planted right at the very beginning grew old and woody so they have been replaced with hydrangeas. But mostly Madge has remained faithful to her favourites, growing dwarf narcissi and fritillaries in old concrete washtubs on the south side of the garden and

"When I explained what I was doing he took off so fast down the driveway and I never saw him again," she laughs. "He's probably still talking about the demented woman who carried bees over to her garden."

Madge has written a book about her years at Morven, *Snow On The Lindis* (Penguin Random House), and she still travels back there from Wanaka to visit family.

"But I'll only go away in July or August when everything is all frozen over and bedded down for the winter," she says. "I don't like to leave my garden. I love it here." ❀

"We gardeners are quite mad, we keep planting and planting. I'm God's gift to the nurseryman, I'm always buying something"

planting avenues of rhododendrons and camellias down the long walk and driveway.

"People think I'm crazy planting rhododendrons here because it's a bit dry, but I have a watering system and once the plants put down roots they seem to take off. I have a huge collection of rhododendrons in different colours now," she says.

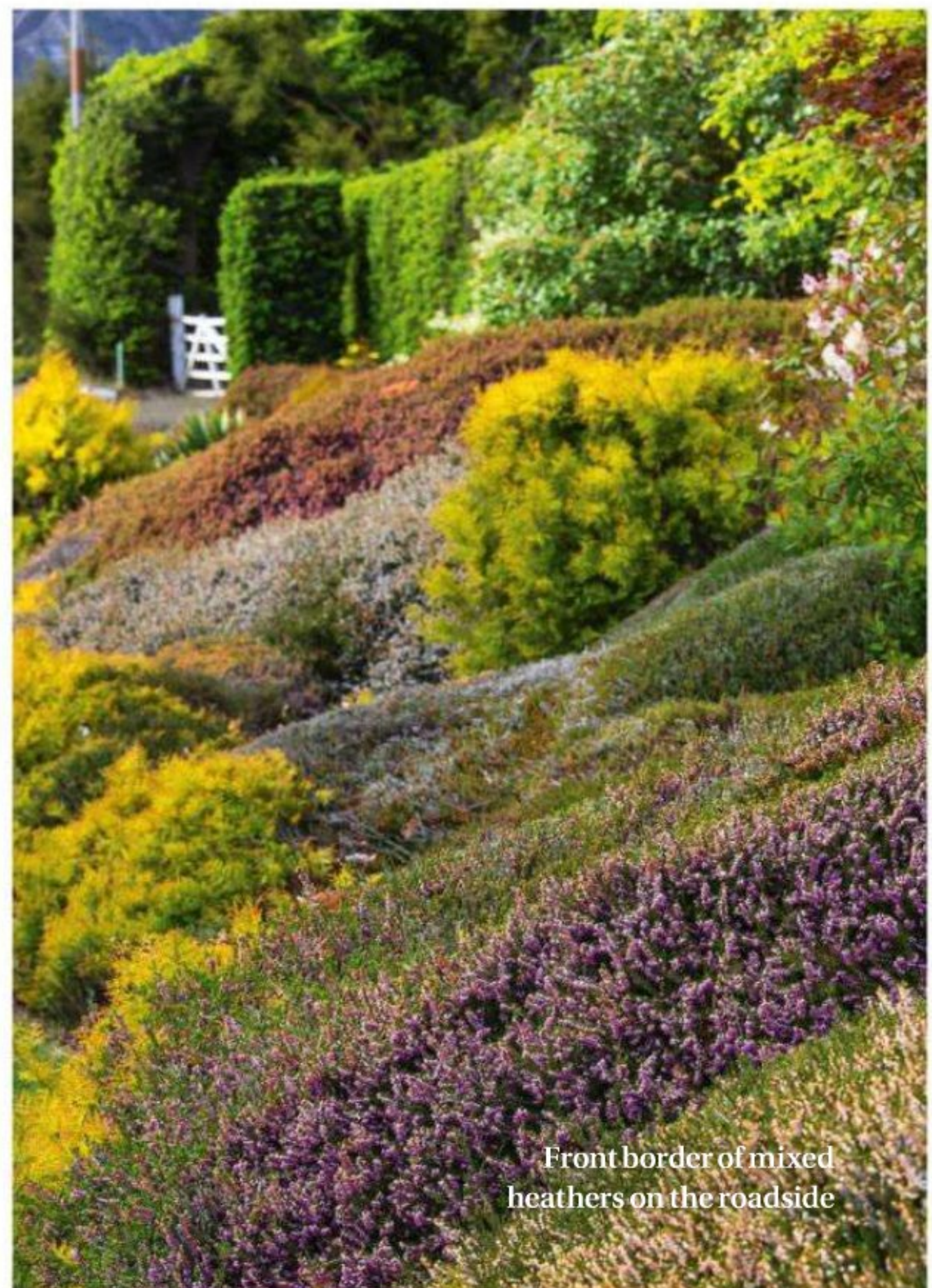
There are lilies planted among the rhododendrons and Madge is getting into dahlias and is also very fond of hostas, especially *Hosta* 'Birchwood Parky's Gold', which she has used in several areas to edge the borders.

Leftover seedlings and bulbs go into the back area, which Madge is still busy filling in. "We gardeners are quite mad," she laughs. "We keep planting and planting and planting. I'm God's gift to the nurseryman, I'm always buying something."

While red, pink and purple shades tend to dominate, Madge isn't one for strict colour schemes and neither is she interested in persisting with plants unsuited to her soil or climate.

"My favourite flower is the carnation, particularly the Otaki pink carnation, but I can't grow them here and it's no use trying."

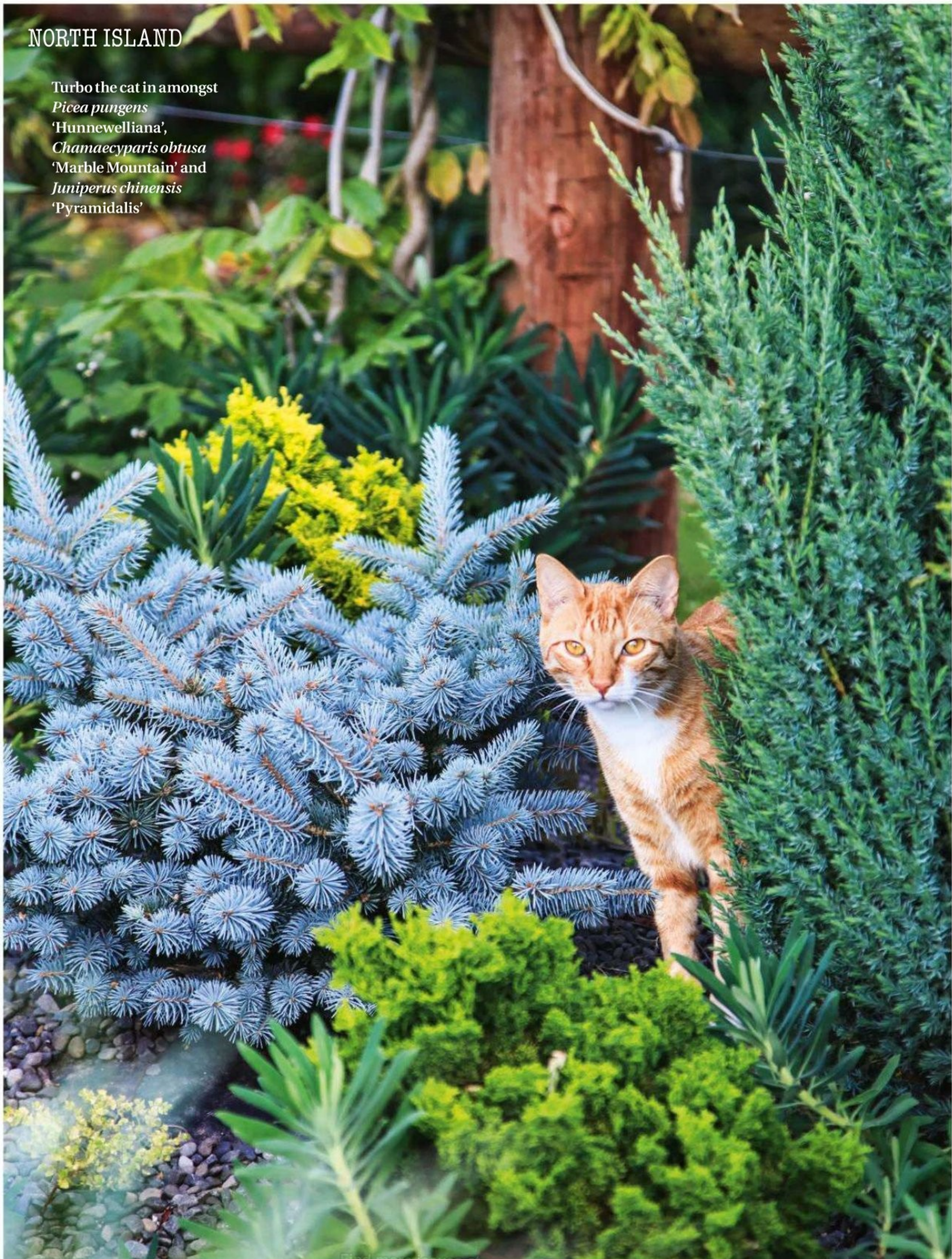
Having said that, she has been known to go the extra mile for a plant on occasion. At Morven there was one, *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* (Chilean Blue Crocus), that flowered every year but she couldn't get it to set seed. She tells a story about a stranger coming up her driveway and finding her lovingly carrying bees from her hives and placing them onto the plant.



Front border of mixed
heathers on the roadside

NORTH ISLAND

Turbo the cat in amongst
Picea pungens
'Hunnewelliana',
Chamaecyparis obtusa
'Marble Mountain' and
Juniperus chinensis
'Pyramidalis'





Lawn and garden are separated by a *Corokia* 'Geenty's Green' hedge

PROMISED LAND

A retired farmer and his wife have taken their love of the land and indulged their every whim to magical effect

STORY: MONIQUE BALVERT-O'CONNOR PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG



A lavender border



Alf's waterwheel



The silver birch-lined driveway

Alf and Shirley on the path to the waterwheel, with Willie the smooth-haired dachshund, who sadly passed away recently at 15 years of age. White Christmas lilies are in the background.



Hydrangea



Clematis hybrid



Oakleaf hydrangea



Grewia



The totara lover's lane sign crafted by Alf sits next to an apt sculpture of an embracing couple

It has been a steep learning curve for Alf, a first-time gardener. But he has been a fast learner and such a garden is something he has always wanted

A water wheel with stream and pond, a palm garden, a woodland walk and lovers' lane are just some of the enchanting aspects of Alf and Shirley Mundt's garden.

Located in Te Puna, on the outskirts of Tauranga, the five-year-old garden looks remarkably established.

A great deal has been achieved in that time by Alf and his mentor – local gardening guru John Burton whose green fingers were formerly industriously occupied in garden centres and nurseries he owned in Hamilton, and later in the Bay of Plenty.

The Mundt's one-hectare site is extensively planted in garden, and Alf is its master. In excess of 3000 trees and shrubs have found a home on this rural property with harbour views, ever since retired farmers Alf and Shirley set about creating a home and garden.

A ginkgo, tall camellia, orange trees, and some big palms were already established on site. A huge variety of other specimens – including about 50 red and green maples – have since been added.

"I planted things suggested by John," Alf says, "although I had a picture in my head of what I wanted things to look like. He has interpreted that in his clever way with the use of plants selected for their easy care, colour, texture and scent. We've planted for year-round beauty."

It has been a steep learning curve for Alf, a first-time gardener. But he has been a fast learner, spurred by the fact that such a garden is something he has always wanted.

"I have always been interested in gardening but it is something that had to wait until retirement as I was too busy earlier raising children, being a farmer, making money. But my family on my mother's side always had big gardens so I guess I have inherited that interest."

It's a very active interest, with Alf heavily involved in not only the planting but the creation of hard landscaping features within the garden.

The section of garden in immediate proximity to the main entrance of the house features a stunning combination of hard and soft landscaping. Alf explains how the walk to the front door is over totara planks with uneven edges, so placed to create the effect of walking over an old farm bridge. A little stream, complete with miniature waterfalls, leads up to this 'bridge' and is then pumped back to a waterwheel constructed by Alf – a street lamp nearby is also the result of his clever craftsmanship.

The wooden path to the front door is flanked by green plantings. Asparagus ferns, leafy rubber plants and *Philodendron xanadu* provide a lush look to one side. On the other, four topiared *Podocarpus* 'Matapouri Blue' (from the totara family) stand to attention, under-planted with mondo, corokia and gardenia as groundcover. The latter is in the mix thanks to its scent – a perfect way to greet people to their home, Alf says. There is an abundance of aromatic plants throughout the garden, Alf adds, including michelia magnolias, *Backhousia citriodora* and "a very nicely scented camellia".

The sprawling garden includes a woodland walk close to the home's main entrance. The walk is not such an immediate attention grabber – this is because, Alf explains, it has been designed to look like a border and provides a pleasant surprise to those venturing along its meandering path.

Metrosideros 'Tahiti' (the Tahitian version of a baby pohutukawa), vireyas, alstroemerias, lavender, birds of paradise, a weeping pear, frangipani trees, white daphne, day lilies, variegated agapanthus and maples are but some



Leucospermum



Leucospermum bud



King protea



King protea



Leucadendron

Favourite plants in the garden? There are many, but one that gets a special mention is the Rhododendron 'Lemon Lodge'



Australian and South American plants are prevalent in this north-facing section

of the delights that feature in this area where there is much to visually feast upon.

"The idea is that as you travel along the path you can only see to the next corner with little bursts of colour as you go around," Alf explains. For example, the various shades of both the leaves and flowers of the vireyas, rhododendrons, ligularia and the maples provide a visual thrill.

Meanwhile, *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' trees and standardised holly are star attractions in the lovers' lane walk; while in the palm garden Alf has added ponytail, sago and wedding tree varieties as well as flaxes to the palms already established on the property.

It is a constantly evolving garden. Additions over the last few years include a pond (complete with lily pads) in the vicinity of the water wheel, and a pergola nearby. Alf talks about balancing this particular section of the garden – it's north-facing and overlooks the harbour – with a gazebo at some stage.

"Shirley thinks I have done enough, but I suspect I will do it one day," Alf quips.

Alf acknowledges that different parts of his garden have specific needs, with this north-facing, hot and dry area being a case in point. Protea, grevilleas and callistemon thrive here. Consideration is also given in this area to plant height, so as not to obscure the view from the house, over the garden, to the water beyond. Japanese-inspired miniature conifers join the South African and Australian proteas, grevilleas and leucadendrons here. A pink bottlebrush and the deep burgundy of *Dianthus barbatus* 'Sooty' are stunning additions.

Favourite plants in the garden? There are many, but one that gets a special mention is the *Rhododendron* 'Lemon Lodge'.

"I am a little bit partial to rhododendrons and this is one of my favourites. Another favourite is 'White Gold' and this can be found down the bottom of the woodland walk," says Alf.



Alf has planted five white paper bark birch trees close to the vegetable patch

A garden “must have” was the pepper tree. It comes with memories of days clambering up one on his grandparent’s property. Fast forward to today and Alf’s own pepper tree resides at the bottom of the woodland walk.

All things edible also have a place at this address. There are apples on an espaliered system, a citrus grove, raised vegetable beds to feed the family year-round, and a boundary planted in feijoas and olives. Sweetcorn, cabbages, caulis, carrots, watermelons, strawberries, lettuces, tree tomatoes, passionfruit, guavas and macadamia all feature in plots planted for year-round production. One plum variety in particular has special significance here – the ‘Mac Verna’ plum was propagated by Shirley’s grandfather, Ernest Sage from Ohaupo.

“It’s not a prolific cropper, it is known as a shy breeder, but it is a big, red plum with a beautiful flavour,” Alf says.

While Alf’s garden resembles a project completed, many of the plants introduced to the property at the start have now grown up, and there’s now the chance to under-plant them, he explains.

He’s lost plants too, over the years, thanks mainly to the root-borne fungus, phytophthora.

“We’ve tried all sorts to try to combat it, but nothing appears to make a difference and there’s no apparent rhyme or reason around which plants it will attack. So we are learning to live with it.”

While Shirley claims her involvement in the garden is to tidy up after her husband – she is full of praise for Alf’s green-fingered endeavours – there’s no doubt she provides inspiration and she enjoys it too.

“The garden has really grounded the house; it’s as if the house really belongs here now. The garden not only looks fabulous and is lovely to be amongst,” Shirley says, “it has made our house a home.”

Meanwhile, Alf says it’s not unusual for people visiting their property to ask who the gardener is.

“I just enjoy the garden. And if other people come and enjoy it too, well, that’s just great.” 🌸

How to visit: The Mundt garden will be open to the public during the Tauranga Garden and Art Festival, November 17-20, gardenandartfest.co.nz.



Alf in his citrus grove



Wisteria and bougainvillea clamber over the pergola Alf made



Cordyline



Hosta



Weigela



Beschorneria yuccoides



Leucadendron



Camellia 'Jury's Yellow'

Camellia nitidissima
(or *chrysantha*) – the
one good flowering
we had on our plant
was in 2011



in pursuit of gold

For decades, camellia breeders have been trying to create the ultimate, elusive yellow hybrid – but will it ever be achieved?

STORY: ABBIE JURY PHOTOS: ABBIE JURY AND TONY BARNES

Whereas we talk about yellow camellias, in China they refer to them as golden camellias, often in tones of reverence and awe. The Jury family has a long history in breeding camellias, and at China's National Camellia Show in February my husband Mark and I were reminded again just how difficult – and elusive – the true yellow remains.

By the time Mark started breeding camellias, his uncle Les Jury was quite elderly and happy to share his experience and goals. It seems remarkable that 45 years after Les registered 'Jury's Yellow', it is still widely grown – we even saw it on the honours table in China. 'Gwenneth Morey' and 'Brushfield's Yellow' are Australian varieties of the same era where the breeders were also trying to create a yellow bloom, but it seems that Les's version is the one with staying power.

None of these breeders of the 1960s and 70s had access to yellow species camellias. They would not have even known of their existence. Les thought it might be possible to get the golden stamens to bleed colour into the petaloids; it worked. These three early yellows all have pale lemon-coloured centres with the outer petals

remaining white. They were colour breaks in their time but they all originated from white japonicas. The trouble was that there really was nowhere else to go from there, in breeding terms, to try and intensify the yellow.

Enter the yellow species. I can remember the waves of excitement in breeding circles when *Camellia chrysantha* became available, opening up a range of new directions. But don't hold your breath – after 50 years and thousands of crosses, there haven't been many encouraging results out of China or Japan – where the camellia is held as a cultural icon – or from other international breeders.

True, the Best in Show award at the Chinese nationals went to a fine yellow hybrid and there was another promising yellow-coloured bloom called 'New Century' on the table. But those are cut flowers looked at in isolation; there are many other factors to be taken into account to determine garden-worthiness. We also saw a few other results from breeding programmes – one flushed palest yellow with pink on the outer petals. It was a hybrid but not of great note. Others just seemed to throw to the japonica parentage. Shen Yunguang, a camellia breeder from Kunming, was crossing the yellows

with a white japonica – the latter will be to get greater size and floriferous characteristics – but the yellow species do not appear to be keen to cross with other types.

If it is possible to get a range of good yellow hybrids, the Chinese will do it, but I doubt it's imminent. What about orange ones? Can we look forward to yellow camellias being crossed with red ones, for a new colour altogether? International expert Dr George Orel believes not, because of the incompatible genetic codes between the yellows and the reds. Again, it is not for want of trying, but the yellows are notoriously difficult in hybridising!

Mark doesn't believe there is breeding potential in the new camellia species that are still being discovered. They are tropical; too tropical for New Zealand. He also accepts that if the Chinese and major international breeders have found them difficult to cross with other camellias, it will be a fluke if a minor breeder in another part of the world comes up with something worthwhile. It is just as well he doesn't want the newly discovered species because with our closed borders, bringing in a new species of anything is devilishly expensive and difficult.

What's in a name?

The most common yellow species in the West and the one widely used for flower tea in China was originally distributed as *Camellia chrysantha*. It is now more usually named as *Camellia nitidissima* syn *chrysantha* – you can use either name but *nitidissima* has precedence. We bought it from Neville Haydon at Camellia Haven. It has handsome bullate foliage – heavily veined and textured leaves – but in all the years since we have had it in our Taranaki garden, it has only flowered well once. It wasn't helped by a pear tree falling on it but it has reached quite a large size and is 20 years old. Our other yellow species have never bloomed either. This is not to say that they won't bloom in other regions... maybe further north.

In the home garden

The yellow species are what I would call collectors' plants – interesting to have, and exciting when they flower. But good garden plants? Not so much. All the species I saw had small flowers and not that many at any one time.



Blooms at the Chinese national camellia show in Dali

The Best in Show went to a fine yellow hybrid and there was another promising one on the table

The flowers usually face downwards and are on the underside of the branches. They are also quite picky about growing conditions and many were sparse in foliage. A good garden plant is a reliable performer that will delight your average home gardener and, with camellias, that means a reasonably long season of mass blooming. This is why there is so much interest in creating good hybrids. If you want to grow any of the yellow species, remember that these are understory plants of the forest, growing in humus-rich soils. They need overhead shade and sufficient light to enable them to set flower buds.

Camellia nitidissima was first described and named in 1948. In 1960, a wild population was found near China's border with

Vietnam and named *Camellia chrysantha* (hence the two names). It wasn't until the 1980s that the West realised there was a yellow camellia species and it remains the only one commercially available in any significant number here.

Since the 1980s, however, there has been an explosion of interest in yellow species and modern-day plant explorers are continuing to find new ones, particularly in Vietnam. It is a fluid situation. There appear to be anything between 28 and 60 yellow species. It is likely that some will be reclassified as variants on existing species while new ones will continue to be identified.

There are at least six notable public collections of yellow camellias in China. I visited the one at Kunming Botanic Gardens where they are grown under cover. We also saw extensive outdoor plantings in Foshan near Guangzhou. The differences in flower form between species are not great to the untrained eye. All appear to have small blooms around 4cm across, usually semi double with a large boss of golden stamens in the centre.

When we talk about new species being discovered, we should remind ourselves that this is being discovered by botanists. Local residents will have known about these plants throughout history. Tea made from the golden camellia flowers is widely served on ceremonial occasions and is now a commercial venture. It seems unlikely it only dates back to the 1980s.

What does golden camellia tea taste like, you may wonder. Subtle, is all I can say. Beautiful to look at, with a subtle floral aroma and taste. ✿



Camellia nitidissima in the
temple gardens of Dali



Camellia chuongtsoensis



The China show's winning bloom



Camellia impressinervis



Shen Yunguang



Camellia impressinervis



Tea made from the golden flowers



Camellia longzhouensis



Drying yellow flowers for tea

IN SEASON

Well groomed

Kiwi gardeners love flaxes and their grassy cousins for the height, colour and structure – and with a little attention each winter, they'll add drama to your garden for years to come, says Neil Ross



PHOTO: NEIL ROSS

Flax are primadonnas, but they work best where their peacock colours are reflected and repeated in the planting that surrounds them

Like an exclamation mark in a sentence, nothing adds an arresting sight to your border better than a handsome native flax rocketing out of the undergrowth – or at least a plant with flax-like genes in its makeup. (We have cheated here and smuggled in a few other interesting native swords.) Flaxes are famously low-maintenance but gardeners get it wrong when they confuse low-maintenance with no maintenance – forget them entirely and you’ll find after a few years that they have become impenetrable haystacks of tattiness. The secret is to plant just a select few then in winter, when gardeners are not so busy, get outside with an old bread knife and prune away the dead skirts. It’s a rule that holds for most other evergreen swords, including libertias, carex and astelias, and by thinning out the foliage you’ll also reduce the risk of pests and disease, such a mealy bug, creeping in.

When choosing your weapon, size is the initial consideration. Do you want swords or daggers? Don’t forget that a cute little Mohican of pink in a nursery pot may well grow into a head-high giant in time – such is the case with the imposing *Phormium* ‘Sundowner’.

Colour will probably be the next thing that tempts, and here you can choose from pinks, apricots, yellows, blacks and browns. In general the more colourful varieties and the black varieties prefer plenty of sunshine and can be a little more

prone to disease – especially leaf spot, a fungal infection that can cause severe mottling of the foliage. Give these plants a little more space in the border to encourage air movement. Good hygiene and regular grooming will also help with this irritation; spraying has only limited value.

Flax are primadonnas but they work best where their peacock colours are reflected and repeated in the planting that surrounds them. This is especially true for the pink, red and yellow cultivars, so always try to add at least

Phormium ‘Dark Delight’

Chocolate fountains may be a bit passé for parties these days but this is a Willy Wonka wonder with arching waterfalls of leaf. Many dark flax fade away when placed in the garden but the sheer bravado of these broad leaves and their lustrous sheen make it shine out. It’s my all-time-favourite flax, used here in perfect combination with *Canna* ‘Tropicanna’ and *Persicaria microcephala* ‘Black Dragon’. (Widely available; try oratanatives.co.nz.)



Phormium ‘Alison Blackman’

is a newish cultivar from the Waitomo nurseryman Barry Blackman. Not all phormiums stand out from the crowd, but this compact (it will grow only up to about 1.5m) variety has an eye-catching blend of dark olive green leaves streaked with lemon-yellow and a narrow orange rim. Available from wairere.co.nz.



Phormium ‘Sundowner’

Is one of the larger and older flax varieties out there – it grows up to about 1.8m tall – and is still one of the best pinks. As the name might suggest, this is a blend of olive green with sunset shades of shrimp and apricot. Available from southernwoods.co.nz.



***Phormium* 'Yellow Wave'**

is easy to grow and a great size for smaller spaces. This is perhaps the yellowest phormium you can buy, plus it has an attractive spreading habit as the leaves arch elegantly. In spring you could team it with forget-me-nots or purple campanulas and later in the year you might add anthemids with their lemon-yellow daisies. Buy from mooresvalleynurseries.co.nz.



***Carex trifida* 'Rekohu Sunrise'**

is the first variegated form of this native species discovered in a batch of seedlings by Lindsey Hatch of Joy Plants. Rekohu is the Maori name for the Chatham Islands, where this tough little shade-spreader grows naturally. It always looks more like a dwarf flax than a grass to me, but its suckering habit and little bullrush-like flowers give the game away. A good evergreen for damp shade. From textureplants.co.nz.

***Phormium* 'Green Dwarf'**

is another favourite that does what it says on the tin: fresh green leaves that don't get diseased and a useful compact size. The big asset here though is the prolific flowering in spring – much better than in any coloured flax – and the seed heads that follow. The plentiful blooms come from its mountain flax (*Phormium cookianum*) heritage. From oratanatives.co.nz.





***Phormium* 'Tricolour'**

is a forerunner to 'Yellow Wave' but has a lot more green in the leaf and the stripes are more creamy than yellow. This is one of the hardiest coloured flaxes and its broad leaves have an elegant arching habit. In time this will make a 1.2m high fountain – lovely with bold leaves such as Chatham Island forget-me-nots or *Ligularia reniformis*, as seen here. From mooresvalleynurseries.co.nz.

a few flowers of a similar shade nearby. Cottage garden flowers such as euphorbias and penstemons are often loose, soft and floppy and they work surprisingly well at softening the harsh lines of a flax and helping it integrate into a setting so it looks at home. Similarly, use the darker varieties against bright backgrounds such as steel or painted stucco walls or they will become invisible in the border.

The place in your garden you need a spiky pick-me-up should also guide your choice. In general the dwarf flaxes are derived from the mountain species (*Phormium cookianum*), which needs good drainage so they are best sited on sunny banks of good soil or in containers. The large flaxes on the other hand are often cultivars of harakeke (*Phormium tenax*), which is much more adaptable, being perfectly happy paddling around in swamps and pond fringes or in dry ground too. *Carex trifida* is another good alternative for wet soils: its broad, handsome leaves are closer in look to a flax than to a grass. If you have heavy shade furthermore, an astelia may be a better bet. The leaf effects are very similar to phormiums but leaves are crinkled not flat and there is a greater range of colours and subtle silver-and-rust or silver-and-red tints to choose from.

The one thing that a small plant at the nursery won't be able to show you is the final shape and habit once it has matured after a few years and this will greatly affect how it looks in your garden. As said, you may want a hard-out exclamation mark where swords poke uncompromisingly skyward such as in 'Apricot Queen' or 'Rainbow Queen'. These varieties work especially well alongside wide, dinnerplate leaves such as hostas and ligularia. Completely different in effect however, are the varieties more weeping in habit, giving an altogether softer and relaxed vibe. I particularly like the ones such as 'Dark Delight' which combine both characteristics; shooting-star straight at first before the tips of the leaves arch over like the ears of a fox terrier. This beauty is an architectural masterclass.

Some of the smaller varieties never get big enough to develop any satisfying leaf form – their swords are twisted and confused, sometimes folding over in the wind and they ultimately make unsatisfying rag-tag specimens. Others are more successful because their leaves exhibit an interesting crinkled twist caused by uneven emerging from their leaf sheaths. *Phormium* 'Surfer'

is like this – the brown edges to the green leaves emphasise the Dr Seuss-like quality of the plant.

Lastly you might want to think about not just leaves but flowers too. Most coloured flax have a disappointing show of bloom – but flax flowers can be spectacular. Look out for the good bloomers such as variegated 'Duet' and spectacular 'Green Dwarf'. You'll love the blooms in spring and the birds will too. ❀



***Phormium* 'Jester'**

You either love or loathe bright foliage but this is my guilty pleasure – a psychedelic celebration of zing. It's a nice compact cultivar reaching about 1m, and the tips of the leaves fall gracefully. Any flax this bright needs a bit of company. I grow it beside glowing pink hemerocallis and in front of *Acer palmatum* 'Chishio' which colours the same shrimp pink in spring as the leaves emerge. Try awanurseries.co.nz.



***Astelia nervosa* 'Westland'**

Their crinkled leaves and berries give them away; astelias are not true flaxes but are used in the same way and are a better choice if you want your swords in shade. 'Westland' is my favourite because of the unique pewter and rust colour combination which is a quintessentially New Zealand tint. This is a more compact astelia than 'Silver Spear' and likes more moisture at the root. Try wairere.co.nz.



TALK
TO YOUR
PLANTS

Many of us know it as king fern, and to Maori it's para but *Ptisana salicina* is at risk, as Xanthe White finds out

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

Q Kia ora, para: also called food of chiefs.

A Kia ora, Xanthe. Yes it is true; once we were tapu to all except rangitira, the clan leaders. In every hapu or family group we had our own appointed kaitiaki, or guardian, to protect us.

Q Is this because you had a special value or just because of scarcity?

A We are giants of our kind and, like many giants, we are slow to grow. The bulbous root beneath is the food that was eaten and much desired. It takes a long time for this to become large enough to make a meal of and, unlike plucking three or four new fronds from regular ferns or taking a few leaves off kawakawa, once the roots are harvested the plants take a while to recover. A proper kaitiaki is taught to harvest sustainably and reserving us for the rangatira meant it limited demand. Our value was such that areas such as Parakai and Kaipara are named for us: kai meaning food and para our traditional name.

Q Now though you are even more scarce in number but still greatly desired – not only as a precious taonga but by plant collectors and even wild pigs!

A Yes, plant collectors like rare specimens and this, together with being eaten by wild pigs, has greatly reduced our numbers in the wild. We are not a difficult garden plant at all, though. It just takes a long time for us to reach a specimen size and we do get very large – up to 3m wide once mature! The key to success is shade and consistent water. Our fronds have that lovely green and glossiness which is commonly a sign of water-loving plants. Once established, even if the fronds die back, we will recover once watered well. If you notice we are dropping fronds this is a sign that watering may be insufficient. Our roots are lovely and bulbous, which is what makes us such an appealing food – but they also provides storage to weather the hard times.

Q So no foraging!

A Definitely no foraging. But if you have a shady, damp spot in your garden we are just the plant you need. Sourcing plants

used to be problematic but as nurseries such as Oratia Native Plant Nursery keep good numbers in propagation then the pressure from plant collectors is lessened. The pigs, on the other hand, are a continuing problem...

Q So what happens when the pigs are culled or removed?

A Where pigs are removed from areas we used to occupy, then our populations recover well. But while plenty of pigs are still out in the bush we are safest in your back garden.

Q Gardeners are always looking for plants that can handle wet, shady areas and often these spaces really need to be filled in so if it can be done with a few plants that can work well.

A Yes, but best you mix us in with other plants that will fill the gaps as we mature, even an easy fern such as pikopiko (*Asplenium bulbiferum*) and some Leptinella spp. running over the ground, or perhaps native *Fuchsia procumbens*. These will create layers for interest as we fill out over time. You can later move them as we establish or let a natural readjustment take place.

Q In terms of attractiveness it's hard to resist not just the size but the quality of your leaves. It's amazing that you've managed to flourish in the understorey where you have to compete for resources with the roots of large trees. Perhaps this is why you ended up with such a lovely fat bulbous root so you could catch the water on your leaves and store it?

A Yes perhaps. We don't think so much about the way we are or why, but we probably should. We are grateful that we are considered of value to Maori and know that part of our future rests in us finding a place in a garden ecology as well as protection in the wild. Perhaps those difficult spots down the bottom of a gully are somewhere we can slowly fill out for you – an improvement to the gingers and acanthus that reign in this domain.

Q You'd be my first pick. ♣



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Frosty windowbox

Pot up pale green and white plants to see you through winter

YOU WILL NEED: Painted wooden windowbox with holes in the base • Crocks • Potting compost • *Dorycnium hirsutum* or *Helichrysum* 'Country Park Silver' • *Convolvulus cneorum* (silverbush) • *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' • 2 x *Cyclamen persicum* (florists cyclamen) • 2 x *Calocephalus brownii* (cushion bush)

1 Soak the plants in water for 20 minutes until the root balls are completely wet. Cover the base of the box with crocks, then half-fill with potting compost and level it. Plant the clover or helichrysum in one back corner, silverbush in the middle, and the artemisia in the other back corner.

2 Plant the cushion bush in the two front corners of the box and the two cyclamen in the remaining space at the front. Add more potting compost around the plants, holding the leaves back to enable you to fill any gaps. Firm the potting compost down around the plants, and water.

Extracted from **The Winter Garden** by Emma Hardy. Published by Cico Books, distributed by Bookreps NZ, \$39.99



the ultimate gardener's bucket list

Jane Wrigglesworth asked 20 Kiwi gardening greats to name their favourite gardens, anywhere in the world. Here's their pick... how many have you seen yourself?

Generalife, Spain

Ruud Kleinpaste, Bug Man

Spain is very special to me. In a way I "grew up" in Andalusia, as its biodiversity and gardens have lured me there since my student days. The gardens of the Alhambra and Generalife near Granada are my Mecca, which I suppose sounds odd in today's turbulent times. Yet in their design the buildings and gardens are so peaceful, leading you from vista to vista through Moorish habitats and long water features. Though the structures may be authentic, the plants are chosen from all over the world. Where else would you see so many cabbage trees and pohutukawa?

1



◀ *Gwavas Garden, Hawke's Bay* **Glyn Church, plantsman**

Located just south of Hastings in Tikokino, Gwavas is a true woodland garden and you can wander where the mood takes you. The massive oaks and pines provide shade and shelter. Down at eye level is the most amazing array of shrubs in all of New Zealand. I first went there with Graham Smith from Pukeiti and after three hours I thought we'd walked for miles when in fact we'd covered only 200m or so because there are so many wondrous, often rare plants. This is a fantastic opportunity to see a range of plants we think we know and then realise there is still so much to learn. The property also contains one of the last remnants of East Coast native bush.

Garden of Ninfa, Italy ▶ **Margaret Barker, Larnach Castle**

Giardino de Ninfa: the world's most romantic garden, located about 80km south-east of Rome. My long-held desire to experience this garden was fulfilled just last year. The Ninfa is named for the nymphs, which were once thought to dwell there. The garden was created last century by three generations of the Caetani family among the waterways and ruins of Ninfa, an ancient village. Perfumed roses and flowering creepers cling to crumbling walls. Ancient trees and rare shrubs in picturesque compositions, enhanced by medieval towers, are reflected in the clear waters. In this enchanting garden I felt the whispering presence of the nymphs and all the people who had passed by since Roman times and even before.



◀ *Villa Melzi, Italy* **Heather Cole, garden writer**

The Italian town of Bellagio on Lake Como rivals New Zealand for sheer natural beauty. It is like Fiordland with terracotta tiles; a rare place where the hand of man has actually improved the view. The gardens in the grounds of the Villa Melzi are a stunning example of this – fine design minds working with the landscape to create a garden that feels timeless. I walked around it when the azaleas were in full bloom and what could have looked gaudy just looked gorgeous. It isn't a massive garden but it is perfect – stately trees and statues perfectly framing stunning vistas and planting that is both riotous and restrained.



Prospect Cottage, Kent, UK

Lynda Hallinan, garden writer

Gardening against the odds is a genetic trait of gifted plantspeople and the late British filmmaker Derek Jarman's quaint cottage garden on the coastal spit at Dungeness, Kent, is living proof of this. There is no soil here, only shingle, so he'd scrape aside the pebbles and shovel in a bucket of compost for every plant. Jarman died in 1994 but his garden, with its spirited wildflowers and casual driftwood sculptures, lives on. A must-see. The local pub also serves excellent fish and chips, so make a day of it.

5



Trott's Garden, Ashburton
Dr Keith Hammett, plant breeder

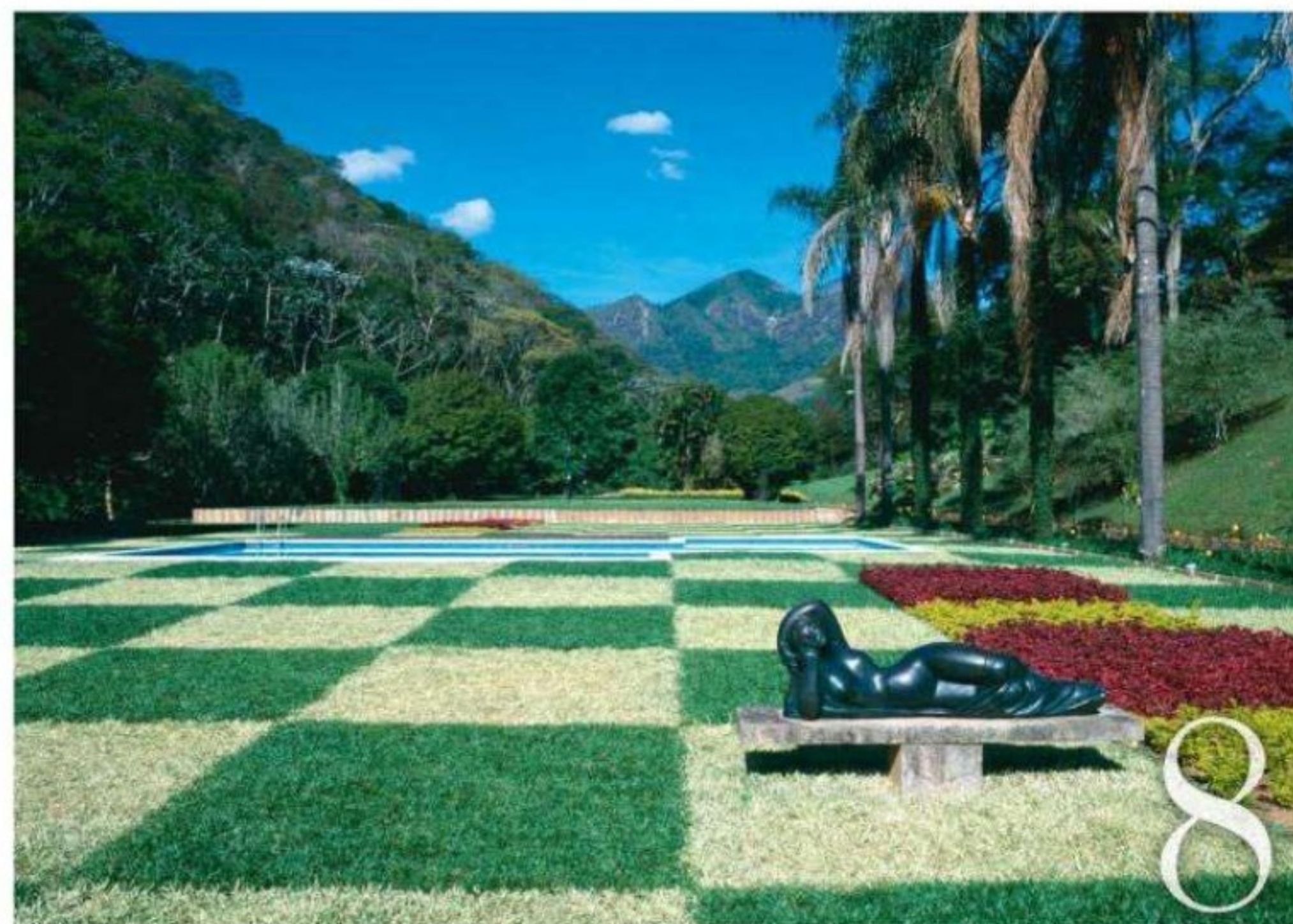
I have a very high regard for Trott's Garden. It's been raised to a Garden of National Significance and I totally concur. It's a very good example of a formal garden. Most notable is the knot garden; even in winter it's a work of art. This is a hard form of gardening to achieve successfully. Alan Trott is innovative in lots of different things. There's the red border, which makes use of a wide range of plants and he's made a huge use of the dahlias I've created, which is rewarding for me to see how my product is taken to the next level. We are both practitioners in the visual arts; just simply operating on different facets.

6

Le Jardin Plume, France ►

Jane Wrigglesworth, garden writer

There is a stunningly beautiful garden – a true hidden gem – near Rouen in northern France, called Le Jardin Plume. I adore it, with its grasses and perennials, neatly clipped hedges, parterres, potagers and orchard – a mix of formal and informal plantings. A wildflower meadow and orchard form the axis of the garden, and a clipped hedge, which mimics the form of sea waves, separates the meadow from the “jardin plume” (feather garden), which is packed with flowering perennials and swathes of tall grasses. Naturalistic planting offsets parterres with geometric hedges. It’s rustic charm meets French formality. Brilliant.



◀ *Strunk garden, Brazil*

Jo McCarroll, NZ Gardener's editor

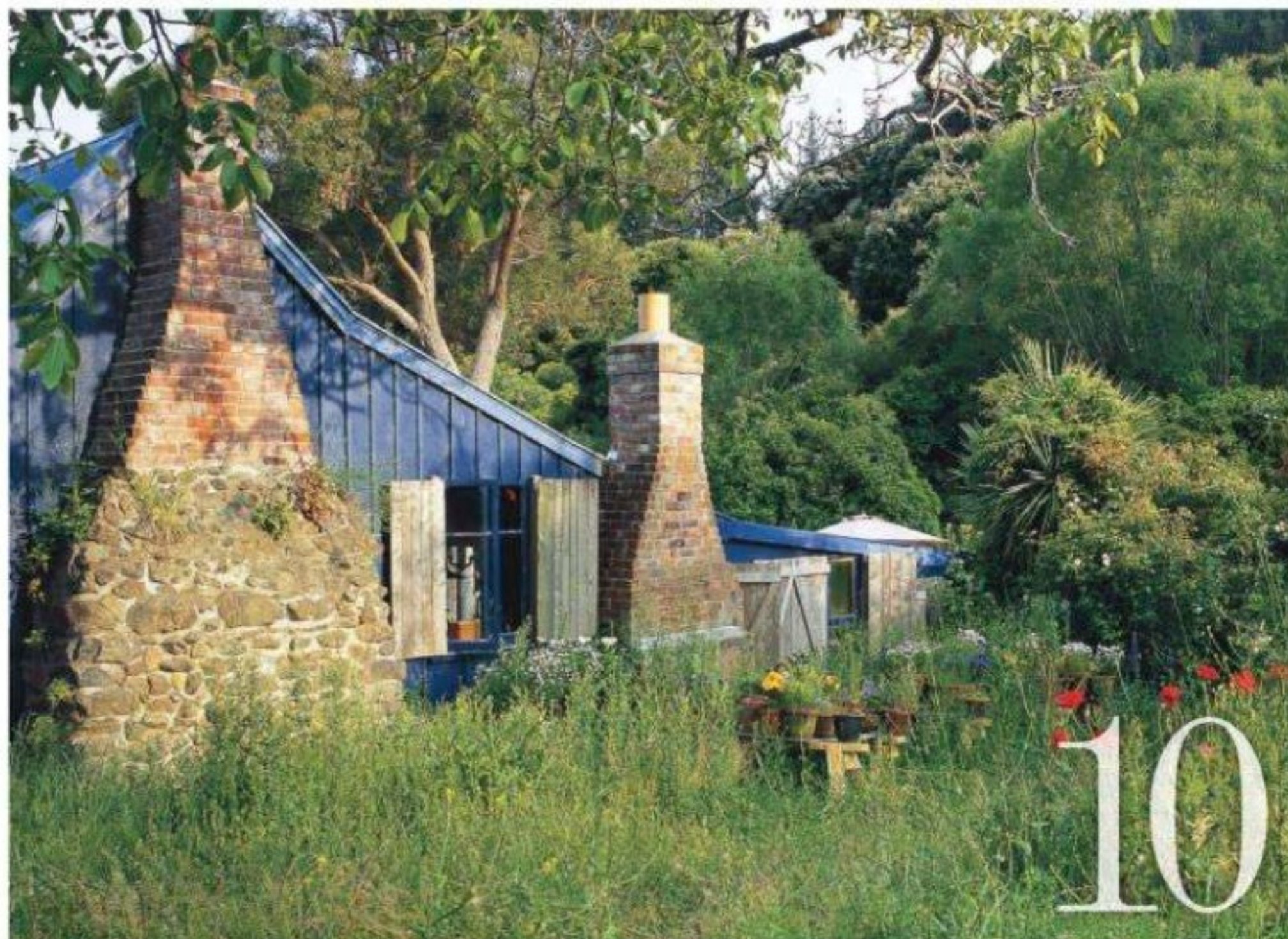
This Roberto Burle Marx garden literally changed how I saw gardening. Editing a gardening magazine, I had heard people described as someone who “painted with plants” plenty of times, and indeed thrown the phrase around myself a bit, but I had never truly understood what it meant. But Burle Marx’s use of colour and texture, and the clean lines mean his gardens are like abstract paintings written on the landscape. Then there’s his stunningly clever plantsmanship – that chequerboard lawn, for instance, is just squares of green and variegated grasses. What continues to amaze me is how fresh, modern and indeed revolutionary his gardens still look. This garden was built in 1954. I find that astonishing.

Le Jardin Séricourt, France ►

Juliet Nicholas, garden photographer

I first saw Le Jardin Séricourt on the cover of *Gardens Illustrated* in 2004 and knew then that I wanted to see it with my own eyes, which I did a few years later. Situated in the northeast of France near the Somme Valley, Séricourt is in a place that resonates with New Zealanders. Its owner Yves Gosse de Gorre says this landscape has been “scratched by conflict” for centuries and his garden pays homage to this. It also talks to our humanity, through imaginative design and the extraordinary use of plants. Exquisite topiary, a cathedral of roses, playful and dramatic, full of contrasts and surprises, Séricourt’s beauty and form ensure memorable viewing year-round.





◀ *Tree Crop Farm, Akaroa*

Mary Lovell-Smith, garden writer

If you like your gardens wild, romantic and exuberant, then take the 2km trip up the valley from Akaroa to Tree Crop farm. The garden fans out from a 150-year-old-plus cottage across a tumbling creek and up the other side of the valley, growing more abandoned and irrepressible as it goes. Over the 30 years that Lynne Alexander has owned the 20-hectare property, she has indulged many horticultural passions; the vestiges of most remain: rose allés, nut and olive orchards, perennials, wildflowers, and vegetable and herb plots. Don't expect clipped hedges or weed-free beds; rather it's a glorious triumph of nature and a gardener at peace with each other.

Wildside, Devon, UK ▶

Abbie Jury, garden writer

We drove two hours each way to visit Wildside near Yelverton in North Devon, and we would drive even further to revisit. It was simply one of the most exciting gardens we have seen. Keith Wiley describes the garden created by him and his artist wife Ros as "an experiment in new naturalism". Wiley has manipulated the land to create different microclimates and he is an exceptional plantsman, almost painting with his plants. It is a relatively new garden, created with a small budget but a big vision, light on hard landscaping yet rich in terms of garden environment. Get hold of the splendid book *The New English Garden* by Tim Richardson if you want to see more photos of this wonderful place.



◀ *King Henry's Hunting Lodge, Hampshire, UK*

Barbara Lea Taylor, rosarian

This was built as a folly for local aristocrats in 1740. Tastes changed, though, and the folly lay ruined until it was discovered in 1947 by the interior designer John Fowler. He made it livable, and around it created a perfectly proportioned garden. Standard, clipped Portuguese laurels mark the point where a path crosses the main axis leading towards two slate-roofed "pavilions" where old roses and herbaceous plants overflow. There are many enclosures, all of them excessively romantic but done with enormous style and sensitivity. And the garden opens to a meadow and a little lake. What more could one ask?



Lotusland, California, US
**Tony Murrell, landscape designer,
broadcaster and TV presenter**

While visiting friends in Santa Barbara a few years ago, they suggested we take a look at Lotusland. Madame Ganna Walska, a Polish opera singer, had a penchant for wealthy widowers. She married six times and with every marriage her garden just got better. It features beautiful lotus beds, humming birds, Jurassic plants, cycads and cacti, but it's a kooky collection of many styles that all work very well in the large setting. The insectary is undergoing renovation but it's a fine example of Ganna's love of nature and understanding of how her paradise needed the support of beneficial insects and birds.



◀ *RHS Garden, Wisley*

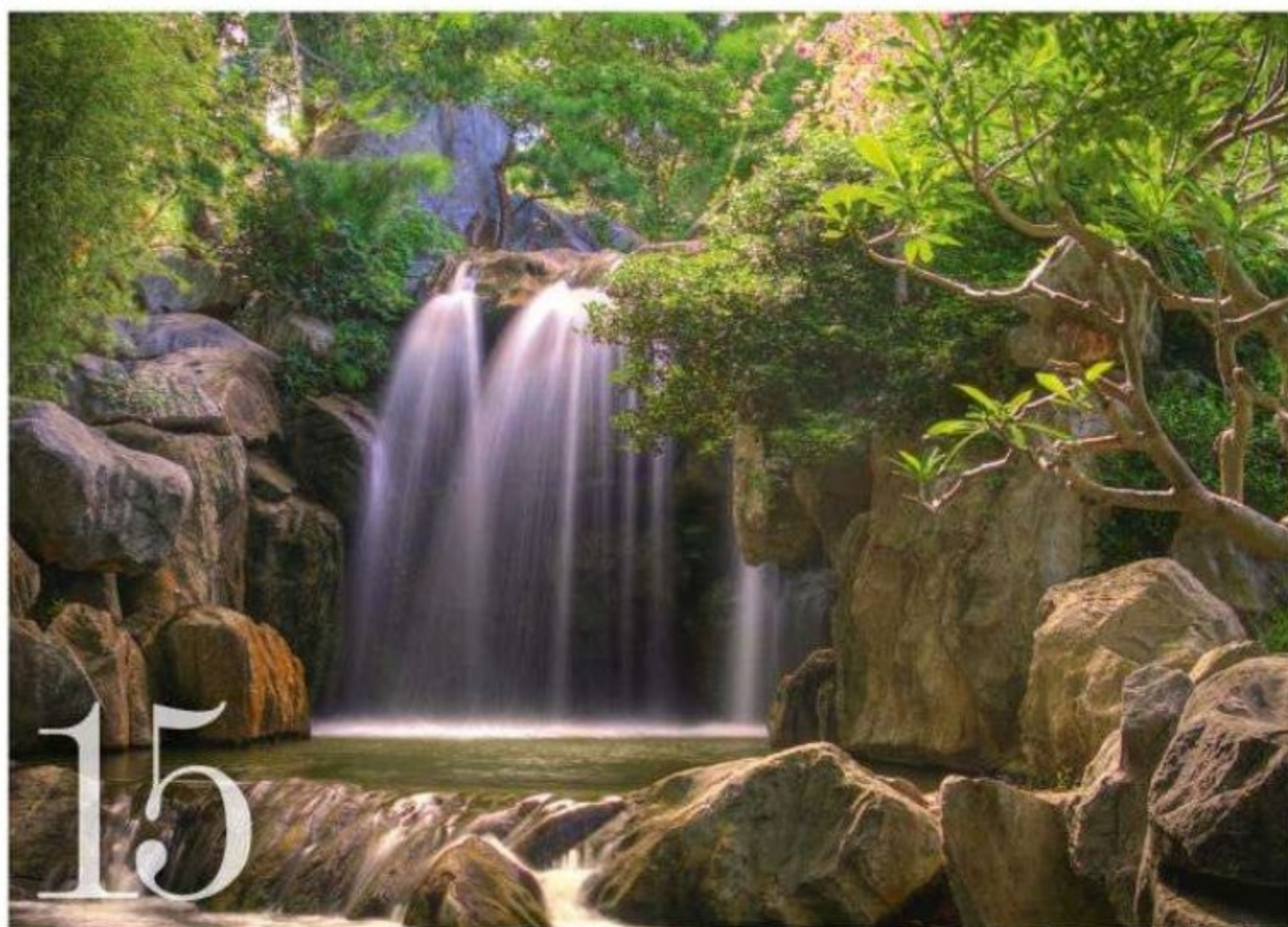
Terry Hatch, plantsman and breeder

Sixty years ago I first went to Wisley and it gets better every year. It's got just about every aspect that you can garden in Europe – an amazing alpine selection, trough gardens, and a huge crevice garden, which is a new type of alpine gardening. It has every different sort of espaliered apples and pears and other fruit. You can even learn how to espalier your own fruit there. It has a wetland area, ponds, lakes and waterfalls. It has ancient trees in a nice setting. It does trials of just about every perennial plant you could ever think of, plus fruit trials and trials of fertilisers. I reckon you can't go to England without visiting here.

Chinese Garden of Friendship, Sydney, Australia ▶

Russell Fransham, plantsman, nurseryman and writer

The hidden jewel at the heart of Sydney's Darling Harbour development is the walled Chinese Garden of Friendship. My first visit many years ago was a revelation. You enter another world in another century as you step inside. The garden was created by Chinese landscape architects in 1988, in the style of the great gardens of the Shang Dynasty 3000 years ago. The exquisitely proportioned traditional pavilions and bridges provide restful viewing points of the waterfalls, lake and mountain with their massive rock outcrops. The sense of perfect balance and tranquillity is profoundly moving.



◀ *Ayrlies, Auckland*

Jack Hobbs, curator of Auckland Botanic Gardens

I was mesmerised by Ayrlies when I first visited 30 years ago; there have been many changes but all for the better and it always reminds me that gardening is art. At a time when whites and pastel shades seemed the only allowable flower colours, Ayrlies was ablaze with golds, yellows and reds. Other parts were predominantly green but with rich textural contrast. The genius behind the garden is Bev McConnell. She continues to apply her fine arts training in her quest for perfection. I have learned much from Bev, and Ayrlies has influenced the look and feel of Auckland Botanic Gardens as well as my own garden.



Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris
Julian Matthews, garden writer

We took off for France at relatively short notice last year when our son announced that he was going to be studying at a university in Paris. While he searched for a flat, we took long train trips and walked for miles to highly recommended gardens, but it turned out that the real gem of our trip was Jardin du Luxembourg, a short stroll from our little hotel. It was a delight, with tree-lined paths, magnificent old buildings and skilful colour schemes using the best (and sometimes never seen before) perennials.

17

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◀ *Barewood, Marlborough* **Kate Marshall, Waimea Nurseries**

My high expectations were exceeded when I first visited Carolyn Ferraby's Barewood Garden in 2004, as part of the Garden Marlborough festival. The potager was a highlight for me with the stunning pear arches, columnar apple trees and berry gardens, and classic brickwork paths. The country-style garden is quite formal, framed by mature trees and segmented by avenues of upright trees, including flowering hawthorns and *Malus tschonoskii*. A must-see property for lovers of edible gardens, perennials and formal gardens. Carolyn is a warm and welcoming host, with a huge knowledge built up from the years of developing the garden.

David Austin Rose Gardens, ► **West Midlands, UK**

Hayden Foulds, NZ Rose Society

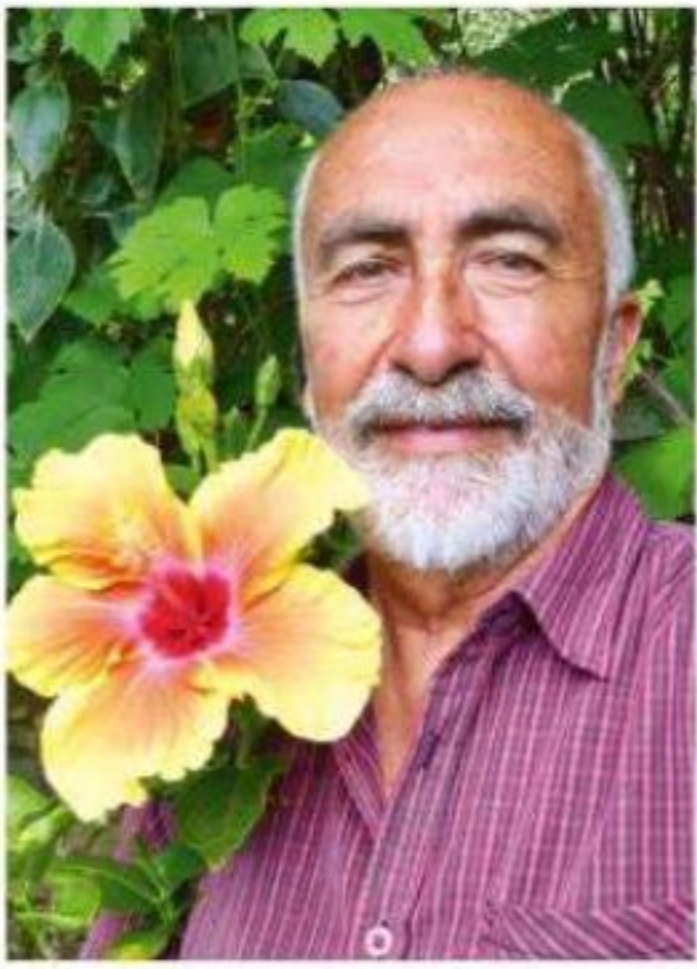
If you have even a slight interest in roses, the David Austin Rose Gardens near Wolverhampton in England are a must-see. They are a spectacular showcase for the queen of flowers, with many beautiful, fragrant varieties growing in six different areas spread over 0.8ha. Naturally, David Austin varieties are a feature here, but there is a good range of heritage roses, including a number of climbers and ramblers, which provide vertical colour. It holds the National Collection of English Roses. This had always been on my list of gardens to see when I visited the UK and it did not disappoint at all, so much so I had to go back the next day to see it again.



◀ *Isel Park, Nelson* **Robert Guyton, ecologist and writer**

I spent countless hours here as a young man, learning the Latin names of trees and enjoying the three-dimensional grandeur to be found in a long-established park. The collection of pines here was a unique one. Cyclone Bola tipped many of them over and if I could, I would visit the 1980s version of the park and re-live some of those magic moments. If not I'd settle for a few hours spent in the 2016 iteration, watching the grey herons flapping about in the crowns of the remaining pines, listening to the drone of cicadas and smell the heady perfume of the Himalayan lilies that grow in the shade of the trees I've loved for many, many years.

✂ FROM NORTH TO SOUTH ✂



76 NORTHLAND

Windswept trees, figs and gardens under snow: our regional experts reveal what's on their minds

in June



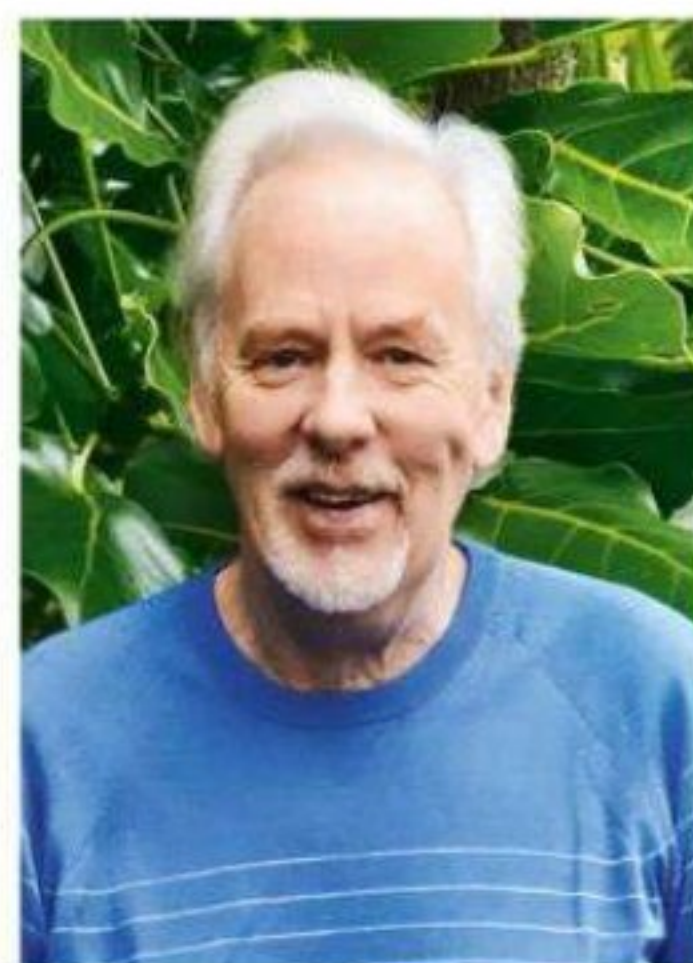
78 AUCKLAND



80 TARANAKI



82 WAIKATO



84 KAPITI COAST



86 NELSON



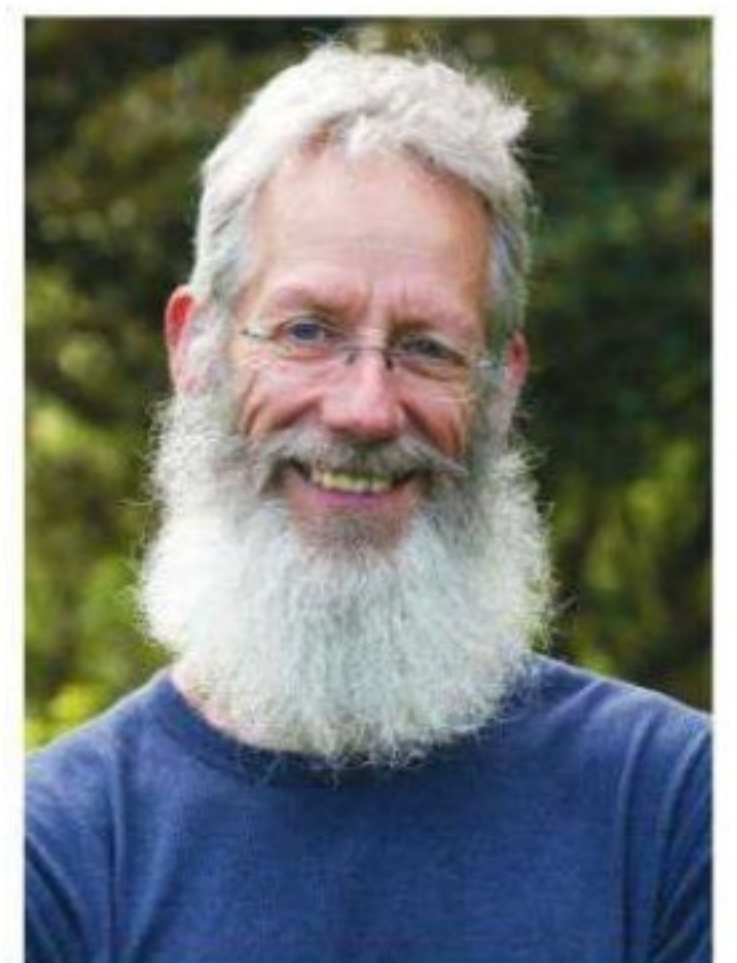
88 CHRISTCHURCH



90 AKAROA



92 DUNEDIN



94 SOUTHLAND



Ficus macrophylla
var. *columnaris* with
secondary trunks
developing

Green giants



Ficus benghalensis in a Hanoi park



Strangler fig is another Aussie import



A graceful young Bodhi tree

Figs to most of us are the dried goods we see in supermarket bulk bins or the rude-looking fruit on our neighbour's tree

You either love them or hate them. But to fig-lovers like me, they are food of the gods: a delicious, sensuous and extraordinarily versatile fruit that can be eaten fresh and succulent, or stewed, bottled or pickled in brandy and served with ice-cream, or made into jams and chutneys, dried, candied... you name it. But enough of hedonistic pleasures.

The common edible fig, *Ficus carica*, is only one of about 600 species of figs which range from sly little creepers to jungle giants of staggering proportions. Almost all of them come from the tropics. And though many of them are edible, none can hold a gastronomic candle to the common fig. I have a weakness for figs in all their slithery, sinister incarnations and my garden is crawling with them. My inheritors may, however, curse my heedless enthusiasm.

One of these tropical giants is the house-plant *Ficus benjamina*.

Also known as the Chinese weeping banyan, it grows in the wild from India to Northern Australia. While it is a dainty pot-plant indoors, in the humid tropics it is ultimately a vast tree with masses of interlocking aerial roots wrapping around the trunk like plaited ropes. There are magnificent specimens draping their weeping branches down the banks of the Brisbane River, while in the Asian monsoon tropics they are towering temple and graveyard trees over 30m high. And they grow here in New Zealand too,

although our cooler climate keeps them to a manageable four or five metres.

The legendary bodhi tree from India grows well here too. The name refers to Buddha's enlightenment while meditating under one, which has led to its Latin name, *Ficus religiosa*. It is a muscular, large weeping tree whose buttressed trunk, branches and ropey roots weld themselves together wherever they touch. Kerikeri's Wharepuke Subtropical Garden has a big, beautiful specimen that is my inspiration to feed mine more.

Ficus dammaropsis, the dinner plate fig, is a spectacular large tree in the jungles of Papua New Guinea and thrives in our cooler Northern climate, making a dramatic impact with its huge 80cm leaves and sprawling form.

The Moreton Bay fig, *Ficus macrophylla* from Queensland, is a massive, imposing beast. Its huge roots radiate across the ground, searching for your septic tank with evil intent. This species is definitely not one for the home garden. In fact, most figs are a menace to plumbing and drains, and in modern tropical cities are increasingly banned.

On Lord Howe Island, the rare endemic fig, *Ficus macrophylla* var. *columnaris*, sends roots down from the branches which reach the ground and become new trunks. So the tree walks in all directions until it single-handedly becomes a small forest. This one is marching across my

lawn with alarming enthusiasm as I write. I should have planted it on the farm next door.

My *Ficus benghalensis*, the Indian banyan, is doing well here too, although much more slowly than in the tropics.

Here too, the horizontal branches will send roots down to become new trunks in time. In India some ancient specimens cover acres with hundreds of trunks. But these are many centuries old.

Many banyans are strangler figs, starting life like our native northern and southern rata. Fig seeds, ingested then dropped by birds, germinate high in treetops with the accompanying bird manure to speed their growth. Long, thin roots snake down to ground level, and once there, they thicken rapidly and eventually the host is encircled and throttled by the self-welding roots. Many an ancient building in tropical Asia has been engulfed and demolished in this way. I must confess to a weakness for plants that bring a hint of a more dangerous, edgy natural world into the garden.

All figs have scary root systems and should never be planted near drainpipes or septic systems.

Nevertheless, it's gratifying to discover that many of the tropical banyans will grow here, creating an exotic, spooky look in a warm sheltered spot.

Especially if they find the septic tank. Years ago I planted a strangler fig outside my bedroom..outside my bedroom and on quiet nights I swear I can hear the sound of slurping. Childhood nightmares about tigers and gorillas under the bed have given way to dreams of a greener hue. ❀



BENDING OVER BACKWARDS

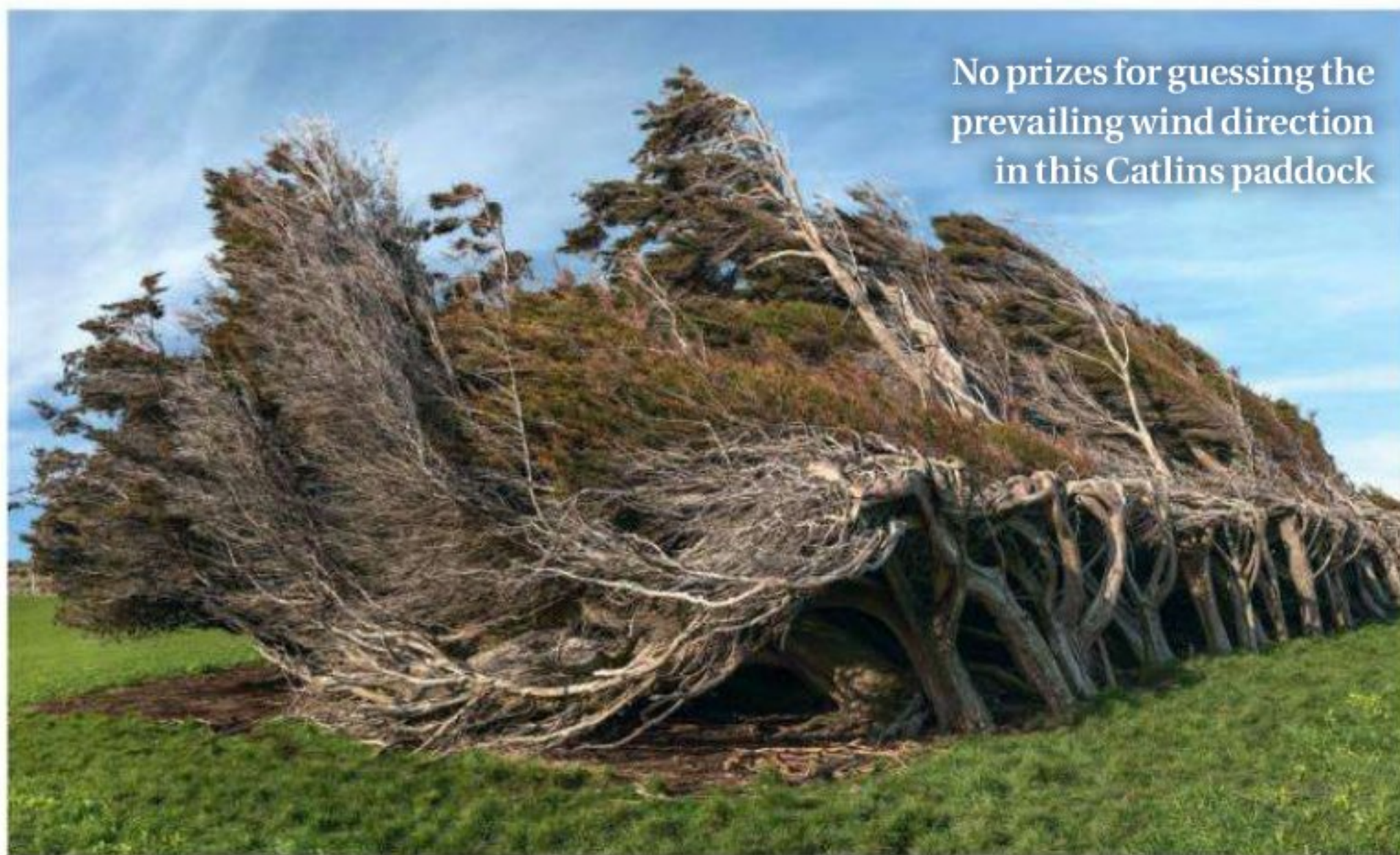


The weird & wonderful way
that windswept trees can
measure wind speeds

Even gardens can have their bad hair days. The sort of days when relentless winds decapitate delphiniums and tackle rows of sweetcorn to the ground. Gusty, godforsaken days when the only sensible course of action is to batten down the hatches and hope for the best... or investigate your options for installing a backyard wind turbine to put all that sustainable energy to economic use.

When I moved to Hunua, my husband warned me about the blustery conditions.

One of the first things he did upon buying this property 20-odd years ago was to plant cypress shelter belts (*Cupressus lusitanica*) for protection. But when I moved in, one of the first things I did was ask him to rip out most of those scraggly hedges to restore the lovely views of the pristine bush-clad Hunua Ranges across the valley. You can't have it both ways, of course, and as our house sits on top of a hill, we're now sitting ducks for ruthless sou'westers and merciless nor'easters.



No prizes for guessing the prevailing wind direction in this Catlins paddock

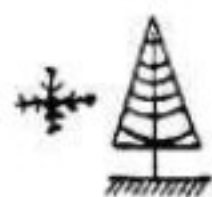
Windy conditions do cruel and unusual things to trees.

Conifers that ordinarily stand tall end up hunchbacked as they hunker down. Pine trees and native totaras lean dangerously, while pohutukawa branch out for ballast. This habit of bending over is known as flagging, throwing and finally carpeting (as pictured above), when the tree declares defeat and simply lies down.

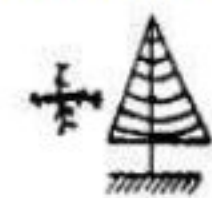
Wind-whipped trees tell all sorts of weather tales. They reveal not just the direction of the prevailing wind, but its general strength over preceding decades. In the 1940s, American botanist R.F. Griggs teamed up with wind turbine inventor P.C. Putnam to research the role conifers play as "historical wind speed indicators" for determining the merits of proposed wind turbine sites. As a result of their collaboration, the Putnam-Griggs Plant Deformity Index was published in 1948.

The Putnam-Griggs Plant Deformity Index has seven stages. At first glance, it looks like a list of squiggles and sailboats, but the illustrations offer a nifty pictorial representation of the changing shape of conifers that bear the brunt of strong winds. The sailboats show what the tree looks like when stood in front of it; the squiggles represent a bird's eye (or these days, drone's) view from above.

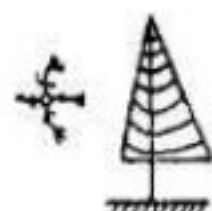
Prevailing wind direction



No deformity



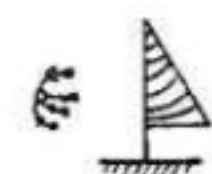
Stage 1: Brushing & slight flagging



Stage 2: Slight flagging



Stage 3: Moderate flagging



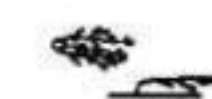
Stage 4: Complete flagging



Stage 5: Partial throwing



Stage 6: Complete throwing



Stage 7: Carpeting

The stages may be familiar if you live in more blustery parts of the country.

They range from brushing or slight flagging, where it looks like the tree has been lightly pruned on one side, creating a slightly asymmetrical effect. This suggests a historic prevailing wind of 11-14km/hour. By stage four, moderate flagging, the tree is a shadow of its former self, with its foliage shredded on one side, leaving bare wood. This suggests a historic prevailing wind speed of 20-25km/hr. And what does it take to bring a tree to its knees, leaving it crawling like a prostrate shrub? Carpeting is caused by winds of more than 35km/hour.

Show me a tree, and I'll tell you how deformed it is...

Ever since local tomato growers – and fellow plant nerds – Angela and Anthony Tringham shared the Putnam-Griggs Plant Deformity Index on my Facebook page last month, I haven't been able to look at a tree without pondering its level of deformity. The stand of kahikateas in our swamp? Stage three. The gnarled macrocarpa in our gully? At least stage five.

Anyone want to play I Spy?

Forget it! Deformed tree-spotting is my new favourite way to pass the time on road trips. Though it has to be said that my husband's interest in the matter is, well, moderately flagging. 🌿

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Sasanqua camellias



Cult status



Camellia Society congress in China

It looks like this is to be the year of the camellia for us. We went to China for the International Camellia Society's biennial congress in February and it has been non-stop camellias since

While the congress in Dali was wall-to-wall reticulatas (more on these in my August NZ Gardener column), one New Zealand cultivar has made inroads to the heady world of Chinese camellias, where they otherwise show complete loyalty to their own. The late Jim Findlay from Whangarei spent many years working on scented camellias and it would not be exaggerating to say that his *Camellia* 'High Fragrance' is a sensation in China – regarded with reverence, even. It is a shame that Jim is not still around to enjoy the accolades and honour in China, the true home of camellias.

Dali prides itself on being camellia



'High Fragrance'



Camellia sinensis



Camellia brevistyla

heartland. Even aside from the colourful displays and ceremonies associated with hosting what was seen as a highly prestigious congress, it was clear that the camellia is a cultural icon unmatched by anything I can think of in New Zealand, except perhaps rugby. It was celebrated in song, dance, art, branding, decoration and, above all else, in plants by the thousand, nay, tens of thousands, grown in containers and displayed everywhere.

Travelling across hemispheres, we arrived home in March to find our earliest camellias already in bloom.

Camellia sinensis is the proper tea camellia and one form we have has the daintiest and earliest little pink blooms. It is, of course, primarily grown for its young foliage, which we sometimes harvest for the freshest green tea experience possible. Lightly crushing the leaves and leaving them to ferment overnight in a warm place gives a stronger flavour, reminiscent even of our favoured Earl Grey. Inspired by our Chinese experience, I am determined to be more organised and consistent in harvesting the foliage in spring this year though we are not going to reach self-sufficiency.

The other very early bloomer for us is *Camellia brevistyla*, with its dainty white flowers.

It is a bit ephemeral with its flowering season (the extremely similar *Camellia microphylla* lasts longer) but its small-leaved, compact form lends it to clipping so we are happy to let it keep its little space in the garden.

Throughout May and into June, it is the sasanqua camellias that take centre stage as the dominant flowering shrubs in our garden.

Most of the sasanqua species originated in Japan and in the camellia heydays through to the early 1990s, they were often seen as the utility relative – good for hedging and sun tolerant but lacking the substance and flower form that were prized in the japonicas and hybrids. Fashions change with time and these days I really like the softer flower form and the smaller foliage, which is usually a good dark-green colour and ideal for clipping and shaping. Also, the early bloomers of the season lift the spirits on grey days of late autumn going into winter.

The other huge bonus of the sasanquas is that they do not get petal blight, which has cut the display of later-flowering types.

The ravages of petal blight (technically *Ciborinia camelliae*) have been a huge disappointment to us and pretty much stopped the inter-generational Jury camellia breeding programme in mid stride. It was particularly interesting in China to see blight and discuss it with professionals from other countries. Australia is still free from it – a good argument for tight border control – but Asia, Europe and the United States have all been afflicted.

I spoke to an Italian researcher who gave hope. They have found a biological cure – another fungus, in fact – that is working well in laboratory conditions but



Petal blight

not yet in the field (or garden). Maybe over time, there is light at the end of the blighted tunnel.

Though we saw blight through the areas of China we visited and discussed it with Europeans, what struck us was that it was nowhere near as bad as we get at home. Mark ruefully said that maybe we have the worst blight in the world. While our coastal Taranaki winters are mild and we get bright sun, we also get a lot of rain and high humidity – optimum conditions for anything fungal, really. China was dry. Maybe gardeners in dry parts of New Zealand such as Hawke's Bay and Central Otago are correspondingly less affected?

Camellias do continue to play a valued role in our garden but the nature of that role has changed in response to that wretched blight. ❀



TREE SECURITY

I have learnt the hard way that tree protection is of utmost importance and even a Fort Knox-type security system is not overkill...

Pesky varmints eating my trees have been known to get me a tad upset. Particularly when it is something special like the Yangmei (*Myrica rubra*) that my parent's Dexter steer reduced to ground level last month. He had pushed through a five-wire (three electric) and warratah fence. Mum and Dad called him a cheeky wee devil but my names include terms like steak.

I don't care what the Gallagher salesmen asserted at the Fieldays, electric fencing

isn't reliable enough to protect trees. A short, a power cut or someone leaving the switch off and bye-bye effort, trees and years of tender loving care. And my stock seem to sense the electricity as they always know when to breach it.

The methods you need to use to protect your trees depend on the threats you have – the first I've listed is actually entirely under your control. Whatever you do never, ever, underestimate animals' determination or their reach.



Don't stint on tree protection



Corrugated iron drums



Cows and sheep will eat bark

Threat: sprays and overgrowth

Stand on new plants, accidentally hit them with herbicide, or ignore them too long and allow the weeds to win the war, and it's game over. Mulch mat and a little surround provide moisture retention, weed suppression and shelter while your plant is getting established, and simultaneously make it easy to find and safely spray up to.

Threat: rabbits and hares

These guys have a 24/7 mission to destroy your plants. A free-ranging terrier is very effective but if this isn't an option, repellents and barriers are where it's at.

It is new growth and the disturbance of planting that attracts our hoppy pests so repellents need to be applied as you plant – the day after can be too late. Depending on rainfall, a repellent can be effective for up to three months but needs to be reapplied periodically to cover new growth.

Commercial preparations are available or for smaller applications you can brew your own (see right).

Blood and bone fertiliser will have the same repellent effect and both are supposed to be effective against other vegetarians – possums, deer and sheep.

Our hatred of prickly gorse is shared by rabbits and hares so if you have it and can handle it, clipped gorse branches will keep them away from your seedlings.

Man-made barriers have been made of everything from cardboard to plastic and all have their pros and cons.

Nurserymen might tell you a 600mm protection is high enough, but Canterbury growers assure me you need to go a metre for full protection from hungry hares. They sure grow them big and mean down there.

Threat: sheep

My pet sheep stands 600mm high at the shoulder, but tree protection is required to at least 1200mm.

Most of the rabbit protector solutions will protect the trunks of trees whose canopy is well above sheep reach but while they are small my choice has been a rigid mesh installed with two warratah fence posts. The galvanised mesh is welded into 70mm x 140mm rectangles – too small for sheep to poke their heads through. It can be cut to length, making your surround as big as needed, and the wire ends bent over to latch the circle closed. Wire onto the warratahs so the mesh isn't touching the ground and they will never rust. The mesh can be tricky to find and somewhat pricey but it's 100 per cent protection, can be re-used multiple times and lasts forever.

Threat: cows

Our cows are a cross between a giraffe and a cat burglar. I found out they'll squash down netting if there is not a rail on top and that electric fences aren't reliable enough.

So for individual trees I use the same wire mesh as for the sheep stacked two high and secured with longer warratahs and if possible, electrified.

Corrugated iron drums are lower and wider but work for trees with their leaders above reach. They are also either electrified or underplanted with prickly wineberry. Both are easily removed and re-used.

For group plantings, we use a permanent wire netting and post fence with an electric wire outrigger. The outrigger is on pig tails, to prevent them reaching over to the tree, but allowing them to graze underneath.

RABBIT REPELLENT

Beat 5 fresh eggs well with an egg beater and mix with 630ml water and 120ml acrylic paint (preferably white with a reasonable percentage of solids). Makes 1 litre (treats 500 seedlings).

Spray approximately 20ml of the repellent on and around each seedling in the field immediately after planting. Is not as persistent as commercial repellents and may need to be reapplied monthly.

What I have learnt

- Tree protection costs two to three times the price of the tree. And it takes three times the effort to install. But you can't stint on it or the planting is wasted.
- You need the protection sorted before you buy your trees. A tree can get root bound and/or die waiting for a fence to be erected and if you plant before fencing, you might as well label it as fodder.
- Work out what protection you need for what pests you have – then double it.
- Check as the tree grows to ensure it is not touching electrified surrounds – the current will have a real negative effect on growth.
- Check occasionally for any problems – such as rubbing, pest build-up (slugs, aphids) or strangling.
- Keep the trunk protected until the tree is really mature. Cows and sheep can and will strip off and eat bark.
- Baby bunnies will die if they get wet and cold. Long wet grass keeps them away and hopefully reduces numbers. 🍀



*Farfugium
japonicum
'Argenteum'*

Winter warmers



Libertia peregrinans 'Goldfinger'



Limonium perezii 'Salt Lake'



Brunnera 'Jack Frost'

Choose light, bright plants to bring some gloom-beating life and colourful cheer to your cold-weather garden

Foliage plants with warm colours can add a cheerful note to winter gardens. The rich yellow leaves of *Libertia peregrinans* 'Goldfinger' have a glow to them when backlit by the low winter sun, and even on a rainy day stand out as a bright note amidst the gloom.

This clump-forming native is a small plant, but its appearance is assertive due to its lance-shaped, upright leaves. It looks good year round and providing it has good drainage and lots of sun it will thrive. It will grow well, and most likely colour best, in lighter, stony or sandy soils, but is very adaptable. It's good for pots too and when grown this way can sit on a deck or be used as a filler in the garden. A late friend who was an imaginative gardener used to always have a pot of bronze carex grass on hand so she could use it as a filler or for contrast in the garden. She would have loved to have a pot of *Libertia* 'Goldfinger' to use this way.

I'm enjoying it as a contrast to low-growing natives with fine foliage such as light green *Coprosma* 'Mangatangi' in a narrow strip of garden. It would look good as a contrast to the strap-shaped leaves of rengarenga (*Arthropodium cirratum*) and I can see it has potential for mingling with red-foliaged bromeliads and aloes.

It's been good to see *Farfugium japonicum* 'Argenteum' available again in some garden centres.

Also known by the old name of *ligularia*,

and might be sold as such at times. Those folk who can't abide variegated plants won't be contemplating this in their gardens, which is a shame as this bold plant lights up dull spots and when mass planted makes a stunning, weed-controlling ground cover. It does have a reputation for being difficult to persuade to produce its best performance, but I reckon all it needs is morning sun and rich soil. I've got some in all-day shade and they don't look nearly as good as those in brighter light. A bit of morning sun brings out the best colouring and makes the plants dense-growing and more arty looking, whereas my ones in all-day shade tend to be more open in their habit of growth and have weaker stems. Food is all important with such bold leaf plants. Sheep pellets work for me, along with a little nitrophoska.

I grow a patch of *Farfugium japonicum* 'Argenteum' in the foreground of the low, evergreen grass *Acorus* 'Ogon', which in the morning sun-only conditions takes on a pleasing soft yellow foliage colour.

The delightful silver foliage perennial *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost' is another that loves a good diet.

It gets sheep pellets, Novatec slow-release fertiliser and regular mulching with compost at my place. It responds to feeding by producing large leaves that make this shade-loving ground cover outstanding, whereas plants lacking in

nourishment look rather ordinary, with smaller poorly coloured leaves. 'Jack Frost' seems to be the variety to go for – others such as the similar 'Looking Glass' don't have quite the same panache, so a brunnera-loving friend tells me. I reckon she's right.

I popped into Palmers Garden Centre at Plimmerton recently.

It's my regular port of call between all-too-regular visits to the Wellington-based dentist and our Kapiti Coast home. While there I spotted a new version of an old favourite: *Limonium perezii* 'Salt Lake', a perennial statice (not to be confused with the annual varieties). It grows way taller and wider than the small species it has been bred from, forming a low bush that seems to produce its papery flowers almost non-stop.

Steve, one of the knowledgeable staff, is most enthusiastic about this plant, which in his garden, planted against a house wall, flowered spectacularly all last winter. He's happy to show customers the photos on his phone to indicate how good it looked.

This is a plant for sunny situations and well-drained soils. It will tolerate poor soils, takes a fair bit of cold and, once established, is drought tolerant. It looks good with yellow daylilies and is stunning in mild-climate gardens among *Agave attenuata*. *Limonium* 'Salt Lake' could be grown as a substitute for lavender – no need for pruning or frequent replacement as it's tidy and long-lived.

There's also a new, very small-growing variety, *Limonium* 'Blue Velvet', which is ideal for growing in a pot and is similarly free flowering. ❀



Dave DeGray and Heather in his Tasman sugar maple grove



In 1984, Dave planted the first of 200 sugar maple trees, *Acer saccharum*, in a sheltered hollow on his four-hectare property in the Mahana hills. Thirty years later and the trees are a towering grove of graceful trunks, reaching upwards of 20m and carpeting the earth with a blanket of beautiful leaves. The initial trees were sourced from a nursery down south but later plantings from Appletons Tree Nursery in Nelson have proven very vigorous.

Now an architectural designer, Dave's earlier career in the US Forest Service and an active involvement in the NZ Farm Forestry Association fuelled his interest in growing trees for timber, shelter, beauty and food. Obviously a man to take a long-term view of things, he planted the trees as a bit of an experiment and to discover how – and if – sugar maples could be a viable crop in New Zealand.

Before his grove was established, the received wisdom was that it could take up to 40 years before sugar maple trees could be tapped; however the remarkable growth rates Dave has achieved in Nelson have shown that some trees can achieve the tappable girth of 25cm within just 20 years.

Although a sizeable grove, the project was never intended to be a commercial syrup operation. At 60 litres of sap to 2 litres of finished syrup Dave estimates a syrup farm would need at least 7000 trees to be economically viable.

What conditions do the trees need?

The sugar maple is a long-lived tree that Dave believes could be tapped for at least 300 years once established and his trees have not been bothered by any pests or diseases.

Maple trees need good drainage, moisture levels, and reliably cold winters to produce well. The trees are harvested for sap in winter when the onset of frosts concentrate the sugars in the sap and the freezing action forces the sap to flow upwards from the roots during the warmth of the day.

Dave has noticed the effects of climate change on the harvests from his Tasman grove over the last 30 years. "It used to be that we had good reliable frosts from the end of May through until September during the 1980s but now the good frosts are often not happening until mid-June".

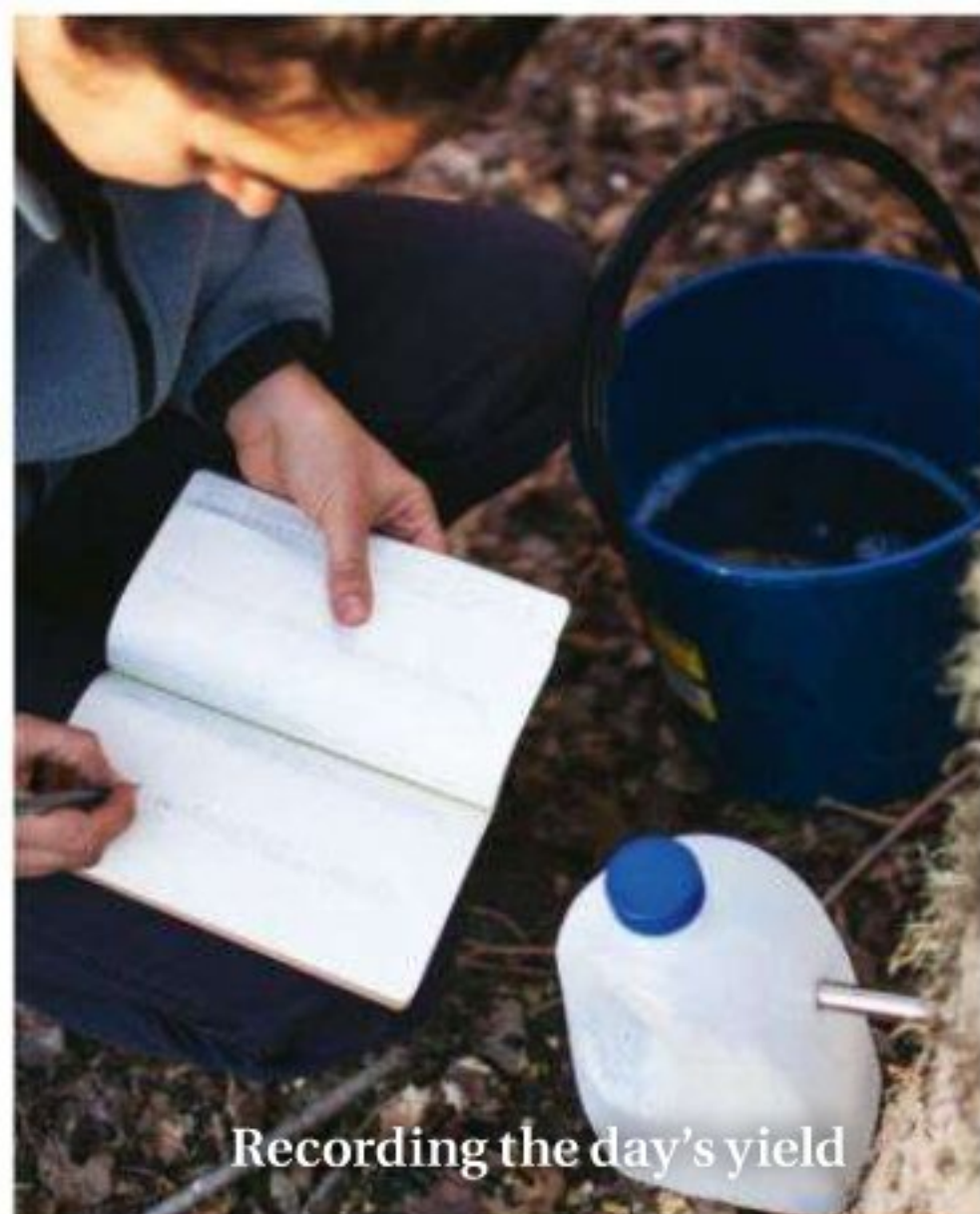
If he was planting again now he would consider areas further south with good

SWEET SAP

Ever since I was a tot I've been fascinated by maple syrup. An aunt once gave me a book about a family of bears and their syrup jug

Every time they turned a handle, it played the 'Little Brown Jug' jingle. The thought that something so sweet and delicious could come out of a tree captured my young imagination, and 30-odd years later I've been doing my own impression of a bear filling my little jug.

Thanks to the forethought of Tasman resident Dave DeGray, I've been able to fill not only my jug but a whole bucket of fresh sap from his secluded grove of sugar maples, right here in the coastal Tasman hills.



Recording the day's yield



The ingenious tap contraption



Reducing the raw sap

rainfall and more reliable frosts such as Murchison or possibly North Canterbury and the Lewis. Dave considers further south cool enough but possibly too dry.

In the early years, the lower branches were pruned off in early summer to create straight tappable trunks and an open forest floor for ease of access. Doing any pruning in early summer gives the trees time to heal so there are no open wounds going into winter. One of the reasons Dave believes his grove of sugar maples has flourished is the leaf mould that he transferred into the ground at planting time, which contained beneficial microbial activity and symbiotic fungi that helped accelerate the trees' growth. Apart from this initial pruning and leaf mulch, the grove has not received any fertiliser or irrigation.

How is sugar maple sap harvested?

The trees are tapped for a week or two at a time depending on the flow and when the sap slows the taps are removed and the trees heal over the tap wounds, showing no long-term damage from repeated tappings.

Dave regards the tapping of the trees as part art and part science. Knowing when to tap is a judgement each winter based on the arrival of the frosts and weather conditions.

The sap flows fastest during the warmth of the day after a cold night, dripping into clean bottles fitted to each tree's tap. Dave's son has designed an ingenious stainless steel tap that plastic bottles are fitted to.

When I helped with the harvest, 33 of the trees were tapped and yielded between 125ml to 1 litre of raw sap per tree each day.

How does the sap become syrup?

Collecting the sap is just the first part of the process towards getting the sweet stuff. The raw sap is a clear and slightly sweet liquid with a Brix measurement of around 3 per cent. To get to a finished syrup with a Brix of 66.5 per cent there is a lot of reduction to do. For every 30 parts of sap you will produce one part of finished syrup and you do this by gently evaporating the sap in shallow pans over heat.

The sap slowly takes on subtle golden hues to become a light caramel colour as it transforms into syrup. Scum that rises to the surface is skimmed off. The lighter the colour the better the quality of the syrup. It reaches boiling point at 106°C and is pasteurised at this point but needs to be kept in a sterile container and refrigerated or it will go off. When the temperature of the syrup gets close to boiling point it is a good idea to transfer the large shallow pans into saucepans to finish the syrup on the stove where it can be monitored closely. It can quite quickly turn to maple candy if you let it get too hot. When cold any sediment or "sugar sand" can be strained off.

And finally... what to do with it!

What to do with my precious yield? I asked Dave his favourite use for the syrup; he suggested finishing off a few rashers of bacon with it, which I couldn't argue with. However, a Canadian friend of mine heard of my syrup-gathering antics and lent me a maple syrup recipe booklet he found on a trip home to the land of the maple leaf. He became all misty-eyed just at the thought of "sugaring" and all the traditions and practices that go with it.

MAPLE PUMPKIN PIE

Ingredients Crust: ½ cup butter

- ¾ cup tightly packed brown sugar
- 1¼ cups flour • ½ cup chopped nuts (hazel, walnut or brazil) • ¼ teaspoon baking soda • ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Filling: 2 eggs • ½ cup tightly packed brown sugar • ½ cup maple syrup

- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg • 2 cups pumpkin purée • 1 cup cream

To make the base, cream the butter and brown sugar in a large bowl. Stir in the remaining crust ingredients until crumbly. Press the mixture into the bottom and sides of a deep 24cm pie dish, then chill. (Halve the filling and cooking time if using a shallow flan tin.) To make the filling, combine all the ingredients and beat until smooth. Pour into the prepared crust. Cover the edges of the crust with foil to prevent burning. Bake in an oven preheated to 180°C for 55 minutes, or until a skewer inserted comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack. Serve with dollop of whipped cream.

Maple syrup works in both sweet and savoury dishes and can be substituted for sugar in recipes. Use three-quarters of a cup of syrup for each cup of sugar and reduce the liquid in the recipe by three tablespoons for every cup of sugar substituted.

Above is one of the best recipes from the booklet – enjoy! So ho ho ho and a he he he – little brown jug how I love thee. ❀



The thorny trunk
of the kapok tree

RIGHT STUFF



Ceiba pentandra



Kapok pods and fibre

A trip to Samoa is a reminder of a tropical-grown tree that could be a fulfilling project for New Zealand gardeners

Tomatoes, beans, taro, ta'amu... Fou is reeling off the plants he grows in his small plantation on the island of Upolu. He pauses, looks around at the trees, and adds vavae to the list. Seeing my blank stare, he explains: "Vavae – you know, kapok." The heat of the noon Samoan sun evaporates and I am back in Wellington in the mid-70s in a grotty flat. My bed is a frame of woven wire on the floor with a lumpy kapok mattress on top.

"Kapok," Fou continues, pointing to the mats and lavalava in a nearby fale, "we use for stuffing our pillows, mattresses."

Well, I never. Never really considered what the cream-coloured, cotton wool-like substance filling a history of pillows and mattresses was. Never knew it grew on trees – the *Ceiba pentandra* tree in fact.

It's also known as the kapok tree and it's native to Central America and northern South America.

This tropical giant was most likely introduced to Samoa via Tahiti in the 1870s. By the late 19th century, the fluffy, yellowish fibre surrounding the tree's seeds had become a widespread mattress filler in most of the Pacific nations.

New Zealand, meanwhile, had its beady eye on the fibre from the new Dominion of Samoa, "an island of blessed possibilities" as it was deemed in a report in *The New*

Zealand Observer, an Auckland-based newspaper, in 1920. The article describes the "exuberant growth" of the kapok tree in the island nation, and the use of its straight timber for fence posts. Noting the Samoans' lack of use of the kapok fibre, of which New Zealand was importing £40,000 worth annually, it recommended it as "an easy and most profitable investment".

It is hard to determine how many took up the call, but the kapok tree was spread across Samoa, almost every home having at least one.

"Families have their vavae trees," says Vevesi Moananu of Wellington. Now in her late 60s, she remembers harvesting it as a young woman. "When the fruit opens and dries out we take off the seeds and put it together to fill the pillowcase. People used to do it a lot but it takes time to do so now people can just buy the pillows or mattress. But we should do it, it's soft and warm and easy to use."

"I remember my grandma in Samoa laying out the vavae in the sun until it turned brown ready to use. It's nice to sleep on," adds Helen Tupai, 40, of Newtown.

Within the last 20 or so years, however, many of the kapok trees in Samoa have been chopped down.

"There's not many left," one octogenarian in Apia told me on a recent trip there.

"They cut them all down, they get too big." (They can grow up to 4m a year, up to 60 metres high and 3m wide.)

"Some remote villages still use them," says Val Ausage, another Apia resident, "but they're no good in urban situations – when they get too big they fall. Also, when it's too big, it is too high to pick the fluff."

Kapok is harvested by hand. After the 15cm-long fruits ripen, they burst, releasing the silky kapok fibres into the wind. A fine layer of wax covering the fibres makes them waterproof and an excellent filling for life jackets. This buoyancy is thought to explain how the tree travelled from its native South America to Africa.

The handsome kapok tree with its umbrella-shaped crown, palmate leaves, and insignificant white flowers would make an impressive garden specimen.

Home-grown pillow stuffing has never seemed easier. But can it be grown here?

Ceiba pentandra is allowed into New Zealand, says *NZ Gardener's* Northland correspondent Russell Fransham. "It's on the biosecurity index of allowed plants," he says, "but I've never seen it here."

Russell believes that pentandra seed collected from wild populations in the coolest part of its distribution, high altitude or the northern-most edge of its range in Mexico, "would do OK here."

"Many other plants from there – dahlia, frangipani and avocado – do fine here if kept dry-ish and well drained in winter," he says. ❀



'Paul Transon'



'Bantry Bay'

It's the time of year when all creatures take refuge from the elements. Water rats look for a cosy shed and possums huddle together under the roof

Thanks to DOC there aren't too many possums in Akaroa now, but rats go on forever. Because my garden runs to a stream, I tell myself that my rats are *Wind in the Willows* water rats – and they are quite pretty with long, silvery fur – but they have to go or they would keep me awake all night with their noisy domestic affairs between the ceiling and the roof. There was one catastrophic year when I foolishly stored all my bulbs in a shed. They ate everything except the anemones – a bit hard on the ratty palate, perhaps – but my tulips, bluebells and snowflakes all went down their ratty throats.

Moving to pleasanter aspects of winter, this is when the fluff of flowers has disappeared.

Garden structures come into their own and lend substance to the garden. In my own garden I have quite a few arbours and arches, as well as something made of wooden trellis that has a peaked roof and you can sit in it, but I would be over-egging the pudding to call it a gazebo.

*Classy
climbers*



'Buff Beauty'



'Paul's Lemon Pillar'



'Ghislaine de Féligonde'

All of these structures are covered with roses or at least rose foliage for most of the year and I think the garden would lose a lot without them – even though by now it also has trees and large bushes.

According to those in the know, the ideal garden should have “water, a change of levels and some formality”. If your plot is as flat as a pancake and you are not planning any earth-moving activities any time soon, you can at least lift the eyes from ground level by creating flowery structures – and roses do this superbly. Someone in the family should be able to construct a simple wooden arch over a garden path – or even a series of arches – and before you know it, you will have a pergola. An arch of roses over a gate will create a feature – and a walk around the garden will reveal more opportunities.

Shops that sell trellis have all these delights ready-made or will make them up for you, so all you need to do is choose suitable roses, and there are plenty to choose from.

Our own Sam McGredy has introduced many good climbers.

I've grown the pink 'Bantry Bay' and the red 'Dublin Bay', and both are well-behaved, long-flowering, easy-care climbers, ideal for an arch or arbour. Every time I see 'Dublin Bay' in flower I admire the intense red of its petals.

'Buff Beauty', introduced in 1939, belongs to the reliable Hybrid Musk family and is all apricots and cream in

spring and again in autumn. Deep apricot buds open to full-petalled, frilly, pale-apricot blooms. It's a shrub climber that grows into a big, well-foliated bush but doesn't climb too high, so it would be a good rose to plant on either side of an arch if you had plenty of room. It does need to be looked up to because its clusters of flowers hang down with the weight of the blooms.

'Paul Transon' is an old rambler, not too rampant, and I used it for covering a gazebo.

For a rambler, its flowers are large, and lovely. From coppery buds, they open as a soft terracotta pink, deeper in the centres, and pointed like a dahlia. The bush is fast-growing and healthy with lovely, shiny foliage, and it repeat blooms through summer.

'Ghislaine de Féligonde' is an interesting rose. Flowers are small and borne in clusters and can vary from yellow to deep apricot with a dash of pink. The bush is vigorous, with very few thorns, and can be treated as a shrub or climber. It doesn't seem to mind poor soil and in full bloom it's a sight to see.

If you don't mind that it flowers only once a year in early summer, you won't find a rose more glorious than the old hybrid tea 'Paul's Lemon Pillar'. Introduced by the English breeder George Paul in 1915, its large flowers are full of soft lemon and cream petals and very fragrant. It's a

JUNE TO-DO LIST

- **SPRAY.** It's not too early to begin the winter spray programme of copper and horticultural oil – particularly if your roses have been badly affected with black spot and/or rust. Simply follow the directions on the container.

Give the roses two applications a fortnight apart and leave the third application until after they have been pruned. Spray generously, making sure that foliage and canes are well covered, and spray the ground around the base of the rose.

- **MULCH.** Make sure the roots of your roses are covered against the ravages of winter. Pea straw is excellent but expensive unless you can buy it at the source. Newspapers or almost anything organic will serve the purpose just as well.

rampant grower, so give it plenty of space such as a wall or an old shed to cover and you won't find a more beautiful rose.

Postscript: I have raved about the rose 'Akaroa' in the past and I will do so again. Bred by Bob Matthews of Whanganui it continues to be the prettiest rose in my garden. There are a few flowers even now – full of petals cherry pink on the surface, and milk white underneath – and the bush has many new canes. Highly recommended. ❁

LET IT SNOW

Winter is coming to Dunedin and while snowscapes can look incredible, the reality is less romantic — until you change focus and accept that it's all part of the South's charm

We bought a castle at 1000ft. It's now less dramatically 300m above sea level, which in a chilly winter is above the Dunedin snow line. A castle in the snow; romantic? Get real. Not for the gardeners, not a bit of it. Their job is out in the cold. They shovel the heavy snow from paths, steps and entranceways. Shaded steps and paths ice over and become slippery, so much so a flame thrower was trialled to melt the ice. Last winter Dunedin had eight of what the forecasters euphemistically called, 'weather events'. This to describe blistering, southerly gales accompanied by blizzards and dumps of snow.

I now live at Macandrew Bay, a seaside village 300m below the castle. I commute by car to the castle. A few minutes

climbing up the zigzag road following a 'weather event' and I hit the snow line. Yes, hit it. From then on it's a challenge not to lose traction and have to abandon my vehicle and walk up the rest of the way.

One snowy morning, I drove all the way up the hill and was feeling pleased with myself. Then on the last, flat stretch of road leading to the castle I drove slap-bang into a large, wind-blown drift that stopped my car. I walked the last little bit in through the gate, only dropping my reading glasses on the way. Then my son drove in and said that leaving my car in the middle of the road was dangerous. "I didn't do it on purpose," I said. "Snow is white and my Alfa is red so they are going to see it aren't they?"



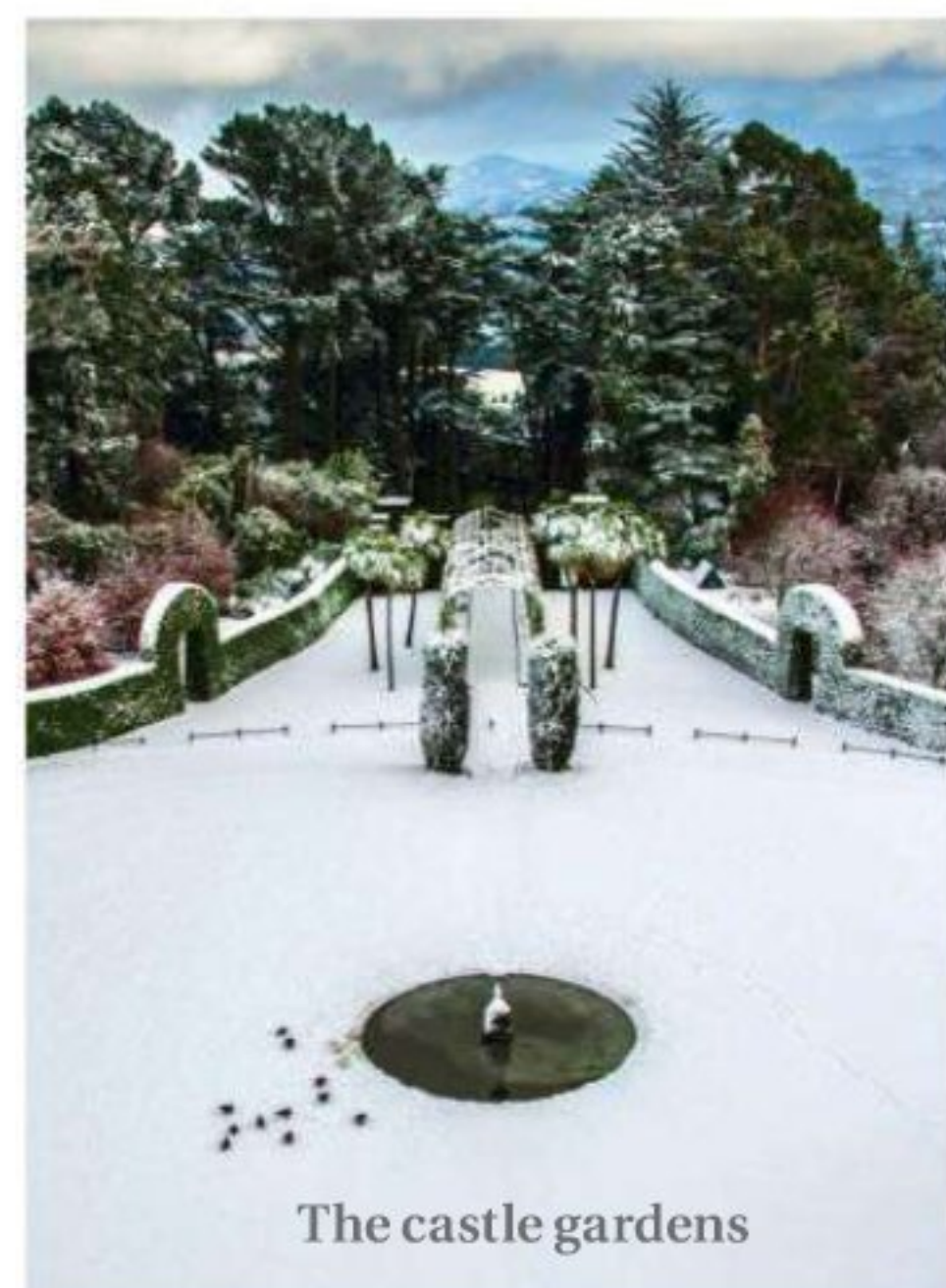
Margaret Barker's
winter view from
Larnach Castle



A 'weather event'



Trialling the flame thrower



The castle gardens

The castle is on a peninsula and is almost surrounded by sea, which modifies the temperature: it's rarely hot or truly cold. I remember some young German visitors, who back home have a continental climate and were excited by the snow. "But you get snow in Germany don't you?" I asked. "Yes we do" they said. "But not on sub-tropical foliage". To their eyes this was a strange and beautiful sight. With snow all about, it didn't look sub-tropical to me. I had to figure out their perception of 'sub-tropical' foliage. They were looking at tree ferns and large-leaved evergreens.

It took me some years to come to terms with this climate having grown up in sunny Hawke's Bay. For at least the first decade of planting

trees, I grovelled in the disappointment of not being able to achieve autumn colour on deciduous trees or cherry blossom in spring. Then I found the positives of our mountainous, maritime climate. I could grow rhododendrons a treat so planted (too) many. Metrosideros, both pohutukawas and rata vines and trees grow well; tree ferns enjoy shaded, sheltered sites and the Chatham Island nikau palm thrived on a steep, wind-blown, north-facing slope.

I was consoled that with these natives, which I planted in quantity. I not only grew plants that thrived in our own climate, but I now had a garden that truly represented coastal New Zealand. In the end, growing the plants that do well for you gives your garden its particular sense of place. ❁



Chinese hawthorn
(*Crataegus pinnatifida*)
standing knee-deep
in wild chervil
(*Anthriscus sylvestris*)

CULTURE CLUB

If you're into the idea of sustainable self-sufficient gardening – and why wouldn't you be – consider joining the permaculture posse

Permaculture is an awkward word that describes an elegant idea. "Permaculture" describes a way of managing your environment; home, garden and beyond, that will improve with time and produce lots of food. It promotes conservation of resources and diversity, using nature as your guide.

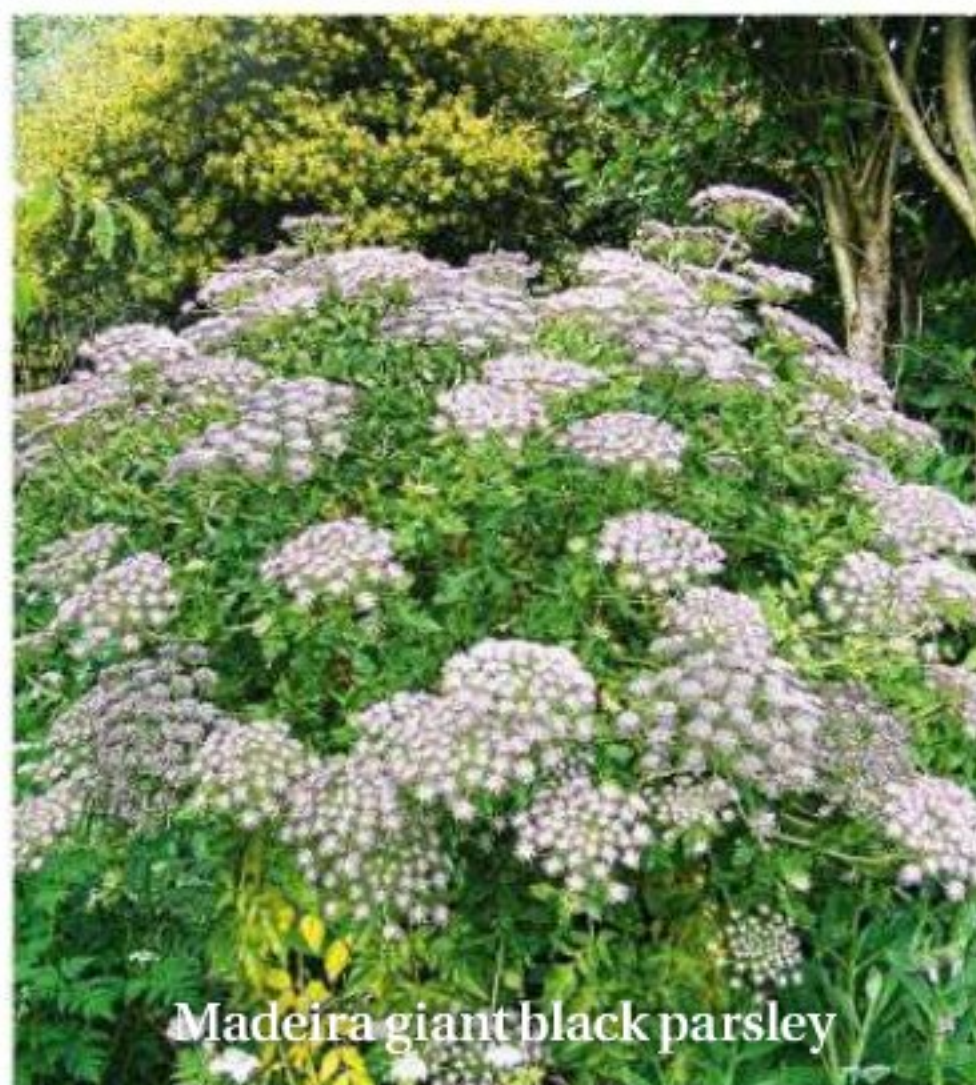
Permaculture and my gardening practices line up nicely. The day-to-day activities of both are similar. We busy ourselves with plants, first and foremost, planting, propagating, tending and harvesting and try to do that in a way that mirrors the way Mother Nature goes about her business. We don't spray herbicides, pesticides or fungicides, believing that dealing death to nature's organisms is a counterproductive activity.

We plant Queen Anne's lace and sweet Cicely to attract hoverflies that love to eat aphids – spraying with aphicides doesn't appeal to us. Wiping out the beneficial fungal web that keeps our plants healthy is not something we want to do either, so we stay our hands when it comes to over-the-counter weed and bug killers.

The very first permaculturalists were Australians, though that shouldn't stop us from giving their ideas some thought.

Bill Mollison and his mates thought about agriculture, horticulture, forestry and gardening and concluded that we needed a new approach and they coined the term "permaculture" – a permanent culture or management that added to the quality of both human life and the natural world.

They did a great job, I believe, of compiling ideas about all sorts, from chicken-keeping to soil conservation, and



Madeira giant black parsley

those ideas have spread around the world over the past 30 years and influenced the way we modern gardeners behave.

I've visited properties all around New Zealand that use permaculture as their guiding light. Those I have seen, my own included naturally, are lovely places to visit. Their style is natural, the healthiness of their plants remarkable and the liveliness of their insect, amphibian and bird life striking. Without the sprays that ordinarily deplete sensitive creatures such as frogs, permaculture properties thrum with life; it's the feature I love most and I feel it most strongly here in my Riverton forest-garden, where the air is filled with the hum of bees and hoverflies, the crick-crick-cricking of frogs and the rustle of wings; cicada, butterfly and bird.

You too could be a permaculturalist.

Some study would help you get a handle on what changes you might need to make and there are plenty of publications for you to explore. Or you could just jump in, based on what you've read here, and that wouldn't be a bad thing; observation and experience are the best tools to employ if you want to take your garden to the next level and make it more resilient, natural and vibrant.

If I was offering a quick-user's guide, I'd say lose the sprays, sow more seed, loosen your control on the plants and keep watch for an increase in life in your garden. Start with your lawn. Shrink it. Don't let it, or your partner, know that you plan to extinguish it, just make incremental changes to the sward, turning its hem into wildflowers or a herbaceous border and they'll not notice.

Sow the seeds of annual and biennial seeds in bulk and see what happens. I released alexanders, wild chervil, sweet



Purple leguminous flower

Cicely, black parsley and fennel into my orchard and the results were glorious! Ferny green leaves everywhere, topped with foamy white flowers throughout the year. It's splendid and the insects love it.

You might like to introduce deep-rooted perennial herbs in order to establish a self-feeding system for all of your other plants, something permaculturalists do as a matter of course. Comfrey around every fruit tree, French sorrel too, and burdock and rhubarb, they all mine nutrients that have been washed deep down and bring them back to your surface-rooting plants. It's a beautiful process and permanent.

Permaculturalists have another clever ploy that helps greatly in keeping the garden strong and healthy: the use of legumes. Members of the fabaceae family, such as peas and lupins, feed their neighbours with the nitrogen they extract from the atmosphere and do it effortlessly. Gardeners who are new to permaculture might be amazed to learn that there are plants that serve as fertiliser providers and do it for free, but it's no surprise to me and other permaculturalists, who have our gardens planted out with legumes for that very reason and know how time- and money-saving that can be.

Have I sold you the idea of permaculture yet? I hope so. I sincerely believe that there is a great deal of good in permaculture and a huge amount of enjoyment to be had in finding out about it and applying the methods in the home garden and orchard. Permaculture, despite its awkward name, is a graceful, valuable way of growing for your table, your peace of mind and for the wider environment. 🍀

TRAVEL

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MCGREGOR'S

The Cleland Garden,
east of Gore

A gardener's road trip to Gore

Nurseries, gardens, parks and bright and cheerful public plant displays,

Jo McCarroll finds Gore has plenty to offer green-fingered guests



Editor Jo McCarroll sings the praises of the warm-hearted southern township of Gore



The 'Goreggenheim' – or Eastern Southland Gallery – houses an incredible art collection, including a number of works by Ralph Hotere and Rita Angus

Gore might be best known as New Zealand's home of county and western – indeed the 2016 New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards for country music will be held over the first weekend of this month. But on my first trip to this tiny southern township earlier this year I found this was real gardening country too. There's plenty here for horticultural tourists to see and do.

1 SPEND SOME TIME IN A PEACEFUL GREEN OASIS

Arne and Jenny Cleland's garden in Gore is a particularly lovely spot – in fact, I like it so much I'll admit I mentioned it in my previous travel story about gardening attractions in Southland! Arne and Jenny have worked with native plants for years and are mad-keen outdoors-people, and seeing how plants grow in their natural environment is what has inspired the planting in their own garden. While there are plenty of exotic plants in the mix, the Clelands have used a wide palette of natives to display an incredible range of foliage, texture, colour and seasonal interest. There's a focus on plants that grow naturally in the Hokonui, some of which are now rare in the wild (look out for red tussock and a threatened species of tree daisy). The garden (next-door to Pukerau Nursery, which the Clelands own and operate) is open 8-4.30pm on weekdays and other times by arrangement.



2 POP INTO PUKERAU NURSERY FOR RARE NATIVE PLANTS

For years, Arne has worked with the Department of Conservation to grow native plants that are threatened in the wild so they can be reintroduced into suitable habitats, so Pukerau Nursery, east of Gore's centre, has a range of plants you rarely see for sale. (Gardeners can help increase biodiversity by growing them!) Jenny says to look out in spring for the sub-Antarctic megaherb *Anisotome latifolia*, aka the Campbell Island carrot, which has umbrella-shaped pink flowers and should do well from Christchurch south. Visit pukeraunursery.co.nz.



Clockwise from top: Stalls at the rhododendron festival held in Gore Main Gardens every spring; sub-Antarctic megaherb *Anisotome latifolia* will be available from Pukerau nursery soon; *Rhododendron* 'Lemon Lodge' in bloom

3 STOCK UP ON UNUSUAL ALPINE PLANTS TOO

Just north-west of Gore is Hokonui Alpines, a specialist nursery that has been selling alpine plants, dwarf perennials and miniature bulbs suitable for rock gardens for more than 50 years. Run by siblings Peter and Louise Salmond, it mainly sells plants via mail order, but visitors to the nursery are welcome (just call first, 03 208 9609). You might think of alpine plants as spring stars, but with hundreds of varieties here Louise says there's something to see from August until May and the plants for sale change every year. Visit users.actrix.co.nz/hokpines.



4 TAKE IN THE GORE HARVEST FESTIVAL & FLOWER SHOW

I was lucky enough to be invited down for the Gore Garden Club's annual harvest show this year. If you are in the area in autumn, make time to see their display of flowers, fruit, vegetables, craft and more.

5 ADMIRE THE HANGING BASKETS AND PRETTY ROUNDABOUTS

While I was in Gore, the council's parks and recreation manager Ian Soper took me on a tiki tour around the area's horticultural hotspots, including the nursery where council staff still grow the bedding annuals used in all the municipal displays (most councils buy in the plants they need). Gore-eans are justly proud of the town's colourful hanging baskets and bright public flower beds.

6 CHECK OUT THE POPPIES AT THE FAIRFIELD ST CENOTAPH

In spring and early summer you should see a spectacular display of Flanders poppies in front of the war memorial. Planted as part of NZ Gardener's Centenary Poppy Project, it's hoped they will self-seed and provide a living memorial every year.

7 TAKE A TRIP BACK IN TIME AT THE GORE MAIN GARDENS

Designed in 1906 by David Tannock, the horticulturist responsible for Dunedin's Botanic Garden, this is a public garden in the old-school formal style. But there's plenty of interesting plants here, some of which Tannock himself planted. Check out the unusual trees in the conifer border and the now gigantic 110-year-old Wellingtonia.

8 WHILE AT GORE MAIN GARDENS FORAGE FOR UNUSUAL FRUIT

Down the south end of Gore Main Gardens is a huge medlar tree that was covered in fruit when I visited in February. It's so fruitful that you are welcome to forage – but be aware that medlars, while nominally edible, are rock hard when picked and need to be "bled" or left to turn deep brown and squashy – to rot, basically – before you can eat them.

Clockwise from top left: In the centre of Gore is a statue to honour the Romney sheep's contribution to the region; the Gore cenotaph; medlars at Gore Main Gardens; bright and beautiful municipal planting is a feature of the town centre and public parks; entries at the Gore Garden Club's annual Harvest Festival and Flower Show held every autumn



A photograph of a garden pond. In the foreground, there are tall, thin, golden-brown grasses. The pond's surface is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. Along the back edge of the pond, there is a dense row of plants. From left to right, this includes clumps of white-flowered grasses, large green plants with deeply lobed leaves (likely Gunnera), a large bush with bright green, finely textured foliage, and a rounded bush with dark red leaves. Behind these plants, a thick line of tall, thin evergreen trees stands against a pale sky.

Lush pond-side planting
around the lake at Arne and
Jenny Cleland's Gore garden

Arne Cleland is passionate about "eco-sourcing" seed for everything he grows — using seed found in the local environment to provide plants suited to local conditions



Several walking tracks
let you explore Croydon
Bush Scenic Reserve

PHOTO: MARTIN SILVA

9 THERE'S A RHODO FEST AT THE MAIN GARDENS EVERY SPRING

See the rhodos at their best, plus there's food, music and market stalls.

10 SEE THE SPRING DISPLAY AT BANNERMAN PARK

Bannerman Park runs along a valley to the north of town. There's a particularly exceptional range of bog plants growing along the streams here – gunneras, irises, ferns, candelabra primulas, astelias and Chatham Island forget-me-nots – and an extensive rhododendron collection including *R. yunnanense*, *R. decorum* and *R. spinuliferum*, all grown from seed gathered in the wilds of China's Yunnan Province. There's plenty to see at other times of the year too, with paeonies in summer, beautiful colour from the maples, oaks, twisty willows and silver birches in autumn, and massed hellbores in winter.

In 1893 Gore's mayor made a case to the government to protect the "fast disappearing bush." Croydon Bush is part of what was saved

11 INSPECT A COLLECTION OF RARE AND UNUSUAL HOSTAS

Bannerman Park also boasts a huge collection of hostas, which includes the late Barry Sligh's collection – Barry owned Taunton Garden and Nursery in Governor's Bay and collected hostas throughout his life. There's now more than 200 hosta varieties growing here, with more being added every year.

12 WANDER THROUGH THE DAFFODILS IN SPRINGTIME

In the same park is the daffodil paddock; a large area of specimen deciduous trees underplanted with daffodils – the bulbs were donated by members of the Gore Garden Club. The public are free to pick the flowers when they bloom in spring.

13 TAKE A LOAD OFF YOUR FEET WHILE YOU ARE THERE

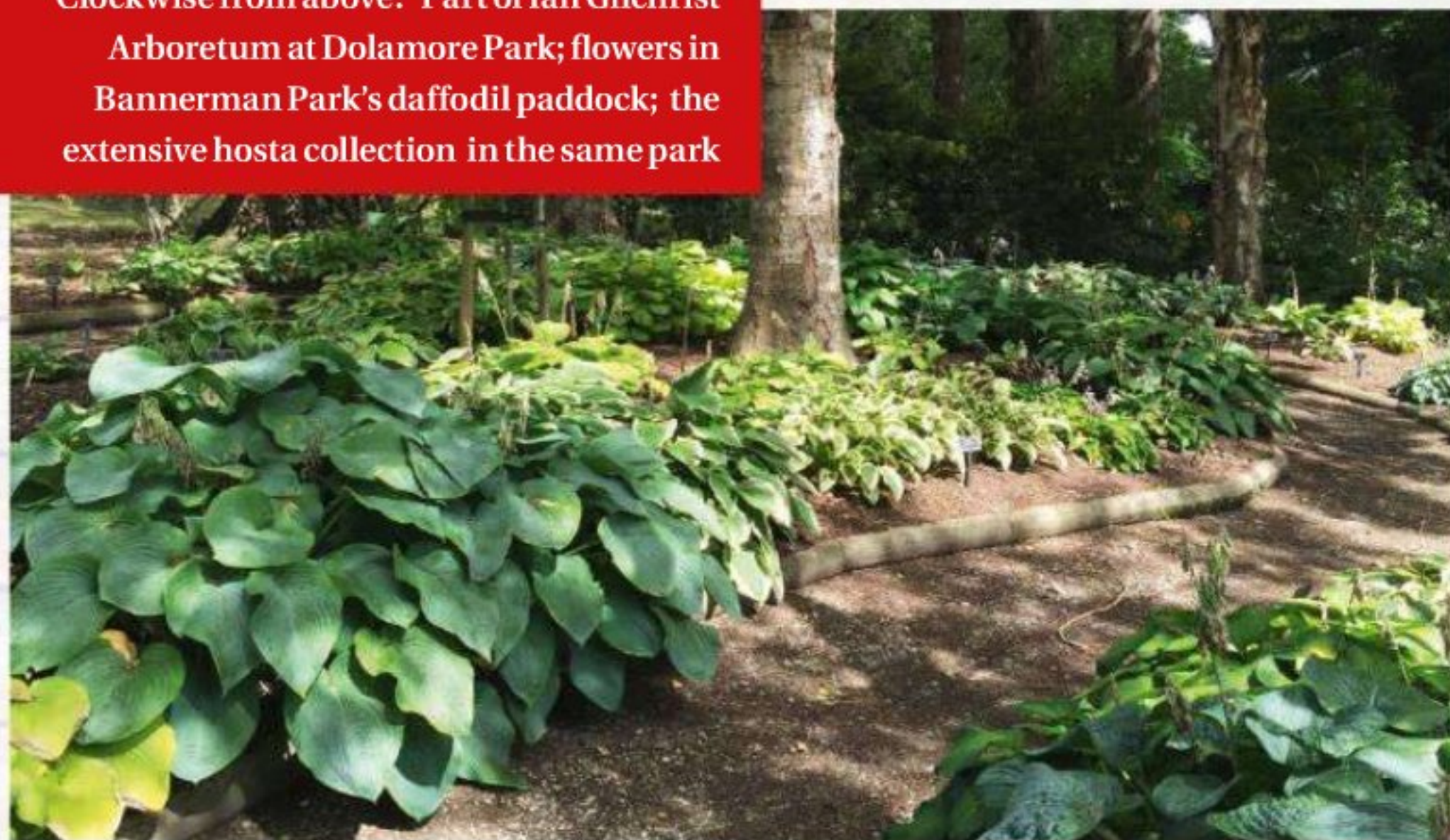
In among the daffodils is a park bench, also donated by the Gore Garden Club, in memory of its late patron Irene McGregor who died in 2009, aged 98. She had been a member of the club for 70 years. Look for the weeping ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula'), planted in her memory here too.

14 SEE HOW SOUTHLAND USED TO LOOK AT CROYDON BUSH

This remnant of a native podocarp hardwood forest is home to a range of birds including bellbird, kukupa (kereru), South Island fantail and tomtit, grey warbler, brown creeper, silvereve and tui. Visit at Christmas when the rata is in full bloom.



Clockwise from above: Part of Ian Gilchrist Arboretum at Dolamore Park; flowers in Bannerman Park's daffodil paddock; the extensive hosta collection in the same park



15 CHECK OUT THE CONIFERS AT DOLAMORE PARK

Parks superintendent for the former Gore Borough Council, Ian Gilchrist was something of a conifer fan. In the 1960s he started planting any interesting varieties he could get his hands on at the south-east end of Dolamore Park, a 95ha reserve just outside of Gore. There are many hundreds of conifer varieties here now, and it was recognised as the Ian Gilchrist Arboretum in 1992.

Many of the plants in this collection are now rare, some extremely so – Denis Hughes from Blue Mountain Nurseries in West Otago has been busy trying to propagate a few of the more unusual ones for sale. Ian Soper told me that although the conifer genus is currently a little out of fashion with gardeners, he is confident it will come back into vogue – and his hope is this will be a valuable collection of plant material for breeders when that happens.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD GARDENING VISITORS SEE?

These are just a few of our favourite places to visit around Gore. If you know of any other must-see gardening destinations, email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz or post to NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. The best entry will win McGregor's tools including a fork and spade, rake, bypass secateurs, controlled release fertiliser and seed packets. Entries close June 26, 2016.



ATLAS

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Grab this spade when there's some real work to be done. Up for digging, shifting, spreading and loading stuff like soil, sand and mulch - with a pointed end to make digging easier.

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JUNE

Gardening odds & sods

New products, your problems solved, make an in-ground worm farm, plus book reviews: *Endavouring Banks*; *Dispatches from Continent Seven*; & *Sweet Treats*

NEW PLANTS



ROSA 'FOR YOUR EYES ONLY'

is a spectacular new persica rose from Chris Warner sold by Tasman Bay Roses. It was voted Rose of the Year 2015 in the UK. A healthy Floribunda, its unique flowers have a deep central blotch, and appear continuously on compact plants.



ROSA 'NELSON COLLEGE'

is a Hybrid Tea from Germany's Rosen Tantau where it is known as 'Piano'. It was renamed by Tasman Bay Roses' proprietor Ben Pratt, after his old school. Note: Tasman Bay Roses has sold out of both 'Nelson College' and 'For Your Eyes Only' for 2016, but your local garden centre may have them or order now for 2017.



ROSA 'IMAGINE'

is a new Hybrid Tea with soft coral-pink blooms and a rich fragrance. Bred by Kiwi rose great Bob Matthews, it's perfect for cutting, with its perfectly formed heads on strong stems. Plants grow up to 1m high. Available from Matthews Roses.



PHALAENOPSIS GRANDIFLORA

is a new moth orchid that bears the largest-grade flower of them all. Grown by Gellerts Nursery, this elegant house plant blooms for many months. If you cut the spike just above the first strong bud (about 20cm above the pot) when flowering has finished, plants should flower again within six to eight months. Available from garden centres and florists nationwide.



NEW PRODUCT

VIKING YARD LEAF RAKE

Make short work of autumn leaves with a Viking Yard leaf rake. The 22 metal tines are springy and robust, and the handle is made of ash wood. Other tools from the Viking range include a fork, paving weeder, trowel, half moon edger, cultivator and a Japanese hoe – all with long handles. The short-handled tools include a flax cutter, cultivator, dibble, daisy weeder, fork, knife, paving weeder, secateurs, trowel and both right- and left-handed Japanese hoes. Available at garden and hardware stores.



'RUSSIAN RED' GARLIC

is an heirloom variety from Crimea, now grown organically by Country Trading Co. A hardneck variety, it produces 6-8 red-tinged, fat cloves of a consistent size. It tolerates a wide range of growing conditions.



'WHITE SOUTHERN SOFTNECK'

produces mid to large garlic bulbs with 6-8 pungent, pink-blushed cloves. Introduced by settlers in Akaroa, this heirloom variety is from Henry Harrington's collection. Grown organically. From Country Trading Co.



LILIUM ORIENTALIS 'POLAR STAR'

is a double Oriental lily with heavily fragrant white blooms up to 15cm in diameter. The flowers are pollen-free and long-lasting, with stems up to 70cm high. Bulbs are ready for planting now. Order from nzbulbs.co.nz.



LILIUM ORIENTALIS 'MAGIC STAR'

is a showstopper with its double, sometimes triple, flower heads with wavy petals. The large flowers with strong stems are excellent for picking. Pollen-free, with a strong fragrance. Available from nzbulbs.co.nz.

NEW PRODUCT



PUDDLE JUMPERS EXTREME SPLASHSUIT

These wet-weather wonders are made from a durable, breathable, waterproof fabric with a soft, thermal fleece lining, double-layered knees and a full-length zip. It's perfect puddle-proofing for adventurers aged nine months to three years. Available in navy or red, and a limited-edition avocado and dusky pink, these are the ideal coverall for little ones who love the outdoors. puddlejumper.co.nz



Plant doctor



Q

BEE FODDER

What is the name of this plant? It grew from one of the seeds in the Plan Bee packet that came with the September magazine last year. It has grown very large and looks so unusual.

RACHAEL WILSON, WHAKATANE

A

It's *Amaranthus caudatus* 'Red Tails', which also goes by the slightly gruesome name of love-lies-bleeding. It's an annual, easily grown from seed and unfussy about humidity or soil conditions but does do best in full sun. The long flower tassels are attractive to bees, butterflies and birds. The seeds and leaves are edible to humans too and are an important food crop in South America and India. There are many varieties and hybrids – some cultivated for the leaves, others for seed or ornamental value.

NZ Gardener launched the Plan Bee project last year to highlight the nutritional stress that honey bees face when they have to travel too far to find food. Packets of nectar- and pollen-rich wildflower seeds were given away and our readers planted them everywhere from the Far North to Stewart Island and the Chatham Islands.

Of all the flowers growing outside NZ Gardener's office in our guerilla gardening Plan Bee patch, love-lies-bleeding has lasted the longest and flowered the most prolifically. They were the late-autumn stars of our carpark planter box, with plenty of visiting bees.

Barbara Smith

Q

INFESTED CLEMATIS

What's wrong with my clematis? The seed heads are coated in white, fluffy damp stuff and the stems are coated with lines of white, fuzzy fluff. It is worst on the viticella but has now spread to all my clematis. What's the best way to treat it?

ROSALIE HENDERSON, NELSON

A

Your photos were sent to Waitara-based clematis grower, Peer Sorensen of Yaku Nursery (MrClematis.co.nz). Peer says that it's most likely that the infestation on the stems is mealy bug but the seed heads are covered in woolly aphids. If you pull apart the seed heads you'll see black aphids inside.

Peer recommends pruning the plants hard and burning the seed heads and heavily infected stems.

City dwellers should seal the debris in a plastic bag and dispose of it in the rubbish. Spray the remaining stems with a 2% solution (20ml oil to 1 litre of water) of horticultural oil, leave it a while to work, then clean the stems with a toothbrush.

To tackle mealy bugs, dab them with a methylated spirit-soaked ball of cotton wool. Mealy bugs infest the roots as well so gently remove the top layer of soil and apply methylated spirits to any mealy bugs you spot. Remember to replace the soil afterwards. Peer says insecticides don't work on adults, so if you spray the larval stages in spring mix it with oil. In summer only oil seems to work. In general, healthy plants are less susceptible to pests and disease so pay attention to watering, feeding and garden hygiene.

Barbara Smith



Q

POISON ALERT

This tree is growing in my neighbour's garden. I think it might be a weed as it is growing so fast and there are lots of seedlings popping up everywhere. What is it and should I ask my neighbour to remove it?

NAOMI THOMAS, AUCKLAND

A

It's *Ricinus communis*, the castor oil plant. Overseas it is grown as a foliage plant as it has striking, large, dark purple leaves, but it has taken too enthusiastically to New Zealand's mild climate. It has numerous clusters of spiky seed capsules which, when ripe, explode and send the seeds far and wide.

Castor oil for medicinal and industrial use comes from the seeds which are often referred to as beans although they're not related to beans in any way. The beans are very poisonous – four to eight seeds is the lethal dose. The pollen is a strong trigger for asthma and the sap causes skin rashes.

Carolyn Lewis from Weedbusters confirms that it is indeed a pest plant. She says, "As well as being poisonous, castor oil plant can be quite invasive so it's important to make sure at the very least that it doesn't seed."

Get rid of it by pulling or digging up seedlings and small plants. Cut down larger plants and paint the stumps with woody weed killer. Wear gloves and long sleeves as protection from the sap. For more information about controlling castor oil plants, visit weedbusters.co.nz.

Barbara Smith



Q

EDIBLE OR NOT?

We found some green pods under a huge tree while we were on holiday in Queenstown. When the pods dried out they cracked open to show nuts inside. Are they some sort of edible nut?

GARIMA BAJAJ, AUCKLAND

A

Don't eat them! They are horse chestnuts, *Aesculus hippocastanum*.

The nuts are toxic and should not be confused with edible sweet chestnuts, which look similar but come from several unrelated *Castanea* species.

Horse chestnuts are usually grown in parks or as street trees as they're a bit big for suburban sections – up to 36m. They have spectacular, erect, candelabra-like flowers in late spring. The name comes from the distinctive horseshoe-shaped scars left on the branches when the deciduous leaves fall.

The nuts aren't toxic to handle and are used to play the traditional game of conkers. Drill holes through the middle of the nuts. Thread through some string (around 30-45cm long) or a shoelace. Knot at each end to stop the conkers falling off. One player holds their conker, as still as possible, suspended by the string. Another player takes a swing at it with their conker. The object is to smash your opponent's conker or knock it off the string. The rules differ wildly from playground to playground. Ask your grandfather for tips or look up "How to play conkers" on instructables.com.

Barbara Smith



Q

MULCH FOR POTS

I've tried using pea straw mulch around my fruit trees growing in half wine barrels, but it gets really messy when birds toss it about. The same happens with wood chips. Can you recommend a better solution?

ANNIE PERCY, BLENHEIM

A

Keeping pots well-watered can be a challenge. Mulch can help reduce moisture loss and also keeps the soil cooler. It reduces weed growth and stops soil being splashed up onto the foliage during watering, which reduces infection by soil-borne diseases.

Mulch mats are one solution to the mess problem. They are available from garden centres, farm supply stores and online. They are fully biodegradable and made out of either recycled wool or paper and some are impregnated with nutrients.

Coconut fibre liners designed for hanging baskets will work too, as will recycled carpet underlay cut to fit. Ensure that the soil is thoroughly moist before mulching. Mats are not particularly pretty so add a decorative layer on top.

Nut shells make an attractive, long-lasting, natural-looking mulch. Or you could try colourful gravel, stones or glass pebbles, which contrast well with succulents and other sculptural plants.

Shallow-rooted annuals act as living mulch. Their leafy growth keeps the soil below cool, flowers attract beneficial insects and some, such as marigolds, deter pests too.

Barbara Smith



KID PARADE



FINLEY HUGHES (4)
of Wanaka hard at work in his
grandfather's garden.



SYDNEY NORGAWA (1)
loves Dad's tomatoes fresh
from their Dunedin glasshouse.



SIENNA WILLIAMS (2)
from Motueka loves digging and
planting seeds in her garden.



CAROLINE YIN (2)
helped pick the apples in her
uncle's Christchurch garden.

DIY INGROUND WORM FARM

A worm plunger takes up little space in a small garden and provides ideal living conditions for the inhabitants

YOU WILL NEED • ear muffs • safety glasses • plastic bucket • drill and bits • hand saw • compost • tiger worms • food scraps • terracotta saucer • 10mm ceramic drill bit • rope



DRILL PLENTY of holes in the sides of the bucket with a general purpose drill bit (3-8mm or whatever you've got handy). The holes are to aerate the bin and allow movement of the worms in and out. Cut off the bottom with a hand saw.



DIG A HOLE in the garden or a raised bed deep enough for the lid to be at ground level. Place the bucket in the hole and backfill around it. Add some compost or potting mix to the bottom of the bucket. This will be the worms' bedding.



ADD SOME TIGER WORMS from another worm farm or purchased from a garden centre. Feed them with a small amount of kitchen scraps at a time. Almost any vegetable waste can be used but avoid too much onion or citrus peels.



DRILL TWO HOLES in the terracotta saucer with the 10mm ceramic drill bit. Thread through a short piece of rope for the handle and knot the ends. When it's full, use the bucket handle to pull it out and move it to another spot in the garden.



FLYNN TUCKER (2)
of Kaiapoi has fun watering the
vege garden and his granddad!

Send in your photos to win gloves and a set of tools from Omni

Each photo published on these pages wins a pair of kids' gloves and a set of garden tools from Omni Products. Visit omniproducts.co.nz to see the full range. Send your photos to Kids' Mailbox, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email your digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz. Please make sure your child is looking at the camera and include his/her age and your postal address.



Get them worm farming in your backyard



Keep them farming with:

- Gloves to protect their hands
- Three piece hand tools
- Shovels & rakes
- Wheelbarrows
- Watering cans in all their favourite colours
- And a garden broom to clean up

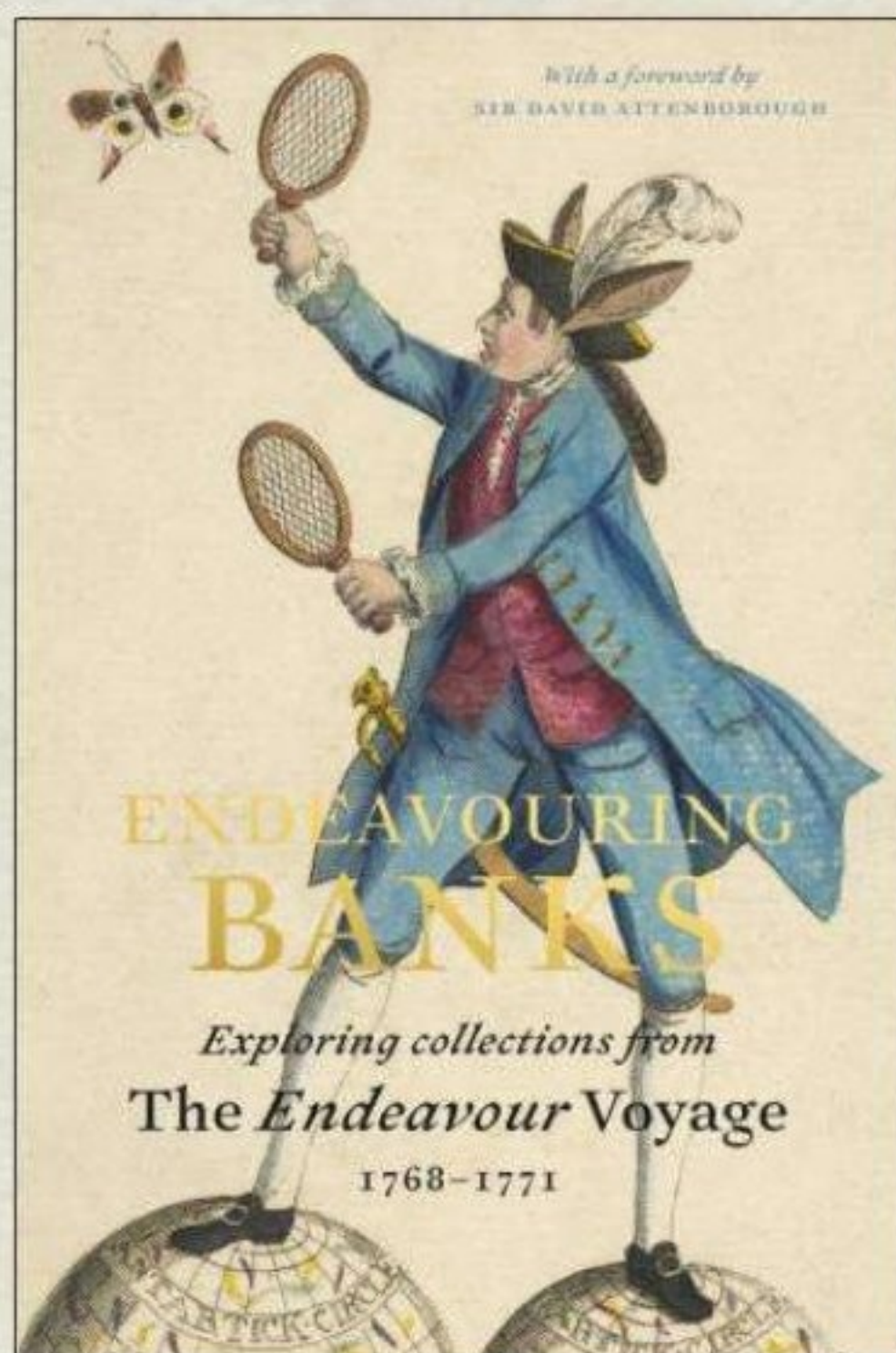


Omni Products and the Lil' Sprouts range are available at leading garden, gift and hardware stores.

www.omniproducts.co.nz

Bookshelf

Christine Rush reviews recently released books about exploration and cooking

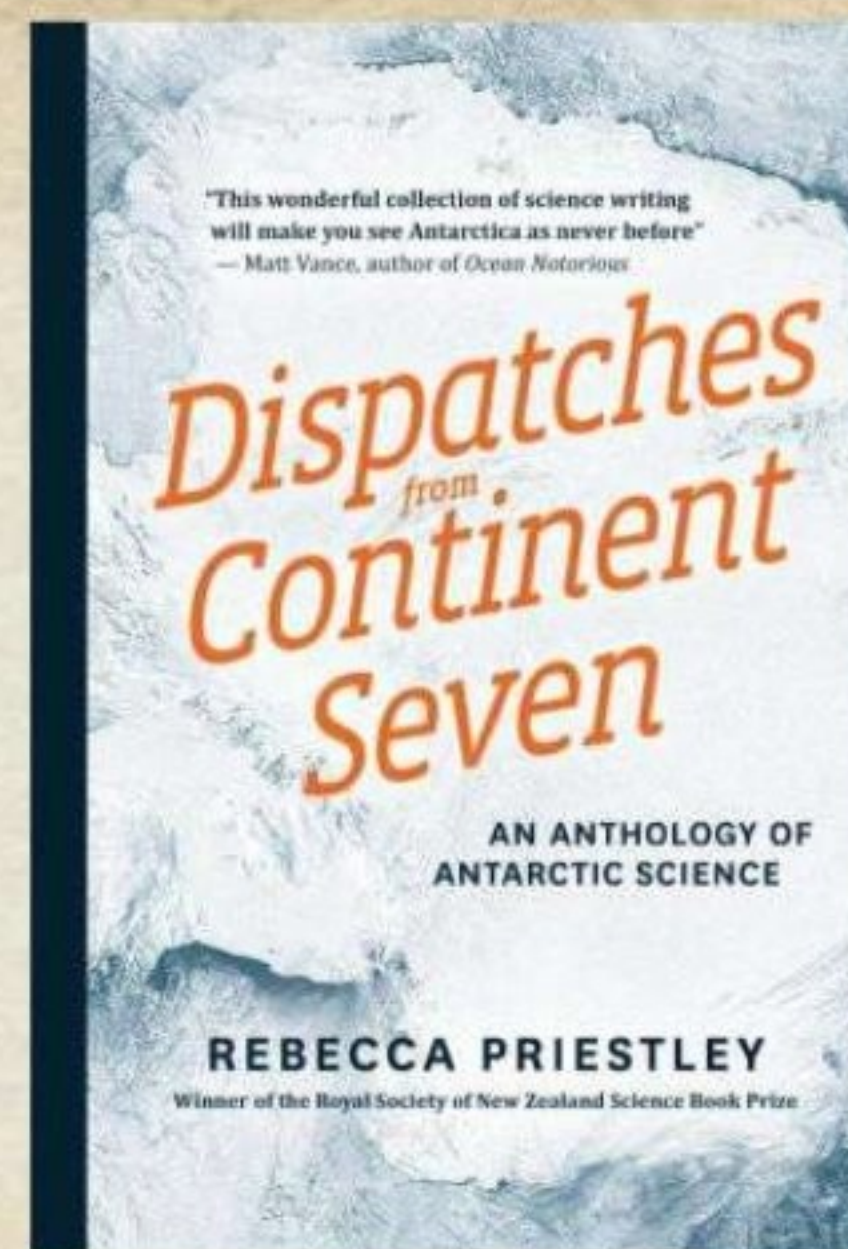


ENDEAVOURING BANKS: EXPLORING COLLECTIONS FROM THE ENDEAVOUR VOYAGE

by Neil Chambers, published by
NewSouth, \$84.99

This is the first of two books on exploration for review this month. Perhaps they're not directly related to gardening, but the middle of winter offers us an opportunity to

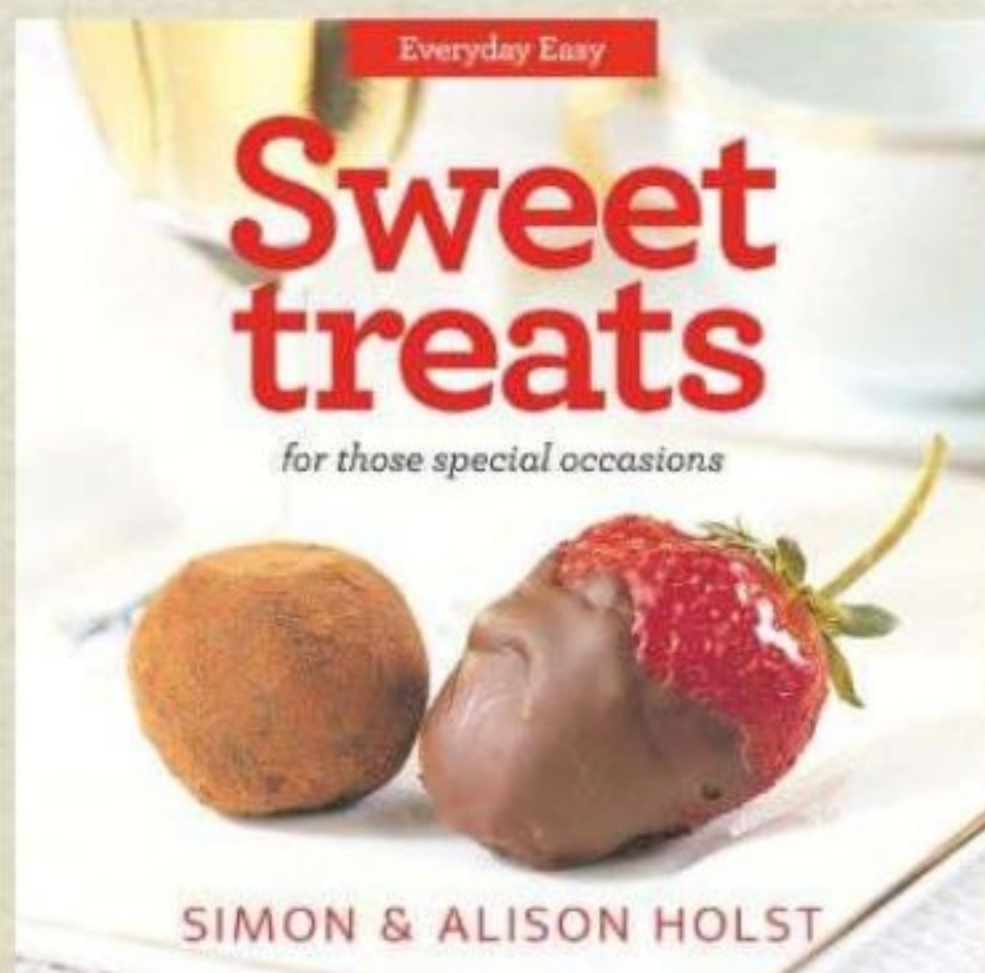
take a well-earned break from most of our gardening duties and put our feet up with an inspiring tome or two. Captain James Cook has been in the news recently – the shipwreck of the *Endeavour* is thought to have been discovered off the East Coast of America – so this is rather timely. Joseph Banks was only 25 years old when he joined the expedition to the Southern Hemisphere, but he was very, very rich, and totally nutty about natural science. Together with two assistants, two artists, four servants and two of his favourite greyhounds (!), he was entrusted with gathering, describing and drawing every bit of flora and fauna he could find. Stopping in Tahiti, Australia and New Zealand – where the peninsula off Christchurch acquired his name – they gathered 1000 zoological specimens, and a remarkable 30,000 pressed and dried botanical ones – more than 1400 of which were new to science. These ended up in various UK museums and institutions, and were only gathered in one place for an exhibition in Lincoln, Banks's home city. This book is the catalogue of that exhibition. It would make a wonderful coffee-table book for anyone interested in natural history – or indeed Maori art and culture, as there are many rare taonga included in this collection.



DISPATCHES FROM CONTINENT SEVEN

by Rebecca Priestley,
published by Awa Press, \$55

Spare a thought this month for the souls at Scott Base who are braving the constant darkness of midwinter in the Antarctic. This book, curated by Wellington-based science writer and historian Rebecca Priestley, extracts notes, diaries, books and reports by scientists and explorers of their time on The Ice. Starting with Captain James Cook's account of his journey from New Zealand to the polar ice in 1773, it includes a guide to travelling by sledge from 1875, a graphic description of the sex lives of Adélie penguins (so shocking for the Edwardians it could be circulated only as a pamphlet!), and a Swedish geologist's joy at discovering fern fossils indicating a much warmer climate millions of years ago. This book is a brilliant insight into the hazards, deprivations and desperate times early explorers faced – and the ongoing research designed to unlock the seventh continent's secrets.



SWEET TREATS

by Simon & Alison Holst, Published by
Hyndman Publishing, \$15.99

Whenever we had a school gala day, there was always a scrimmage to see who got to man the lolly stall. I usually got lumped with the drinks, but while I doled out endless cups of cordial I would be fantasising about the homemade hokey-pokey, fudge and toffee apples on the other side of the hall. This little book of recipes is a blast from the past, when children's party tables groaned with chocolate crackle cakes, rocky road and marshmallows. After finding myself

with a big bag of walnuts recently, I tried the candied nuts recipe (recreated in this issue on [page 32](#)) and it was such fun; home science in action! (Although I did have to warn my colleagues to watch their tooth fillings the next day.) Simon and Alison Holst are of course proper home economists, so the instructions and ingredients are very simple and easy to follow; most importantly, the recipes work. I can't wait to make the salted caramels; homemade marshmallows and barley sugars. I mean, if you can't have a few indulgences in front of the TV or fire in the depths of winter, when can you?

Events Guide

NORTH ISLAND

June

- **Pukeiti Explorer Day.** Pukeiti annual bird survey. Learn the sounds of the forest and the food that birds love to eat. Take part in our annual survey and compare birds at Pukeiti to help monitor and protect them. 2290 Carrington Rd, New Plymouth. 10am-3pm. pukeiti.nz. **June 5**
- **Hollard Gardens.** A beginner's guide to permaculture in the home garden. Final of three workshops: companion plants and supporting species within your permaculture plan. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 2-4pm. hollardgardens.nz. **June 5**
- **Tupare workshop:** Home garden composting. How to form the basis of rich compost by recycling garden waste to apply to your garden. 487 Mangorei Rd, New Plymouth. 2-4pm. tupare.nz. **June 12**
- **Auckland Herb Society Winter Seminar.** Don't miss our two excellent speakers, Lynda Hallinan and Jenni Yee Collinson. Visitors \$10, members \$5. Afternoon tea, trading table. Horticultural Centre, 990 Gt North Rd, Western Springs. 1.30-4.30pm. Lynn 09 818 4348 or Diane 09 416 3095. aucklandherbsociety@gmail.com. **June 18**
- **Hollard Gardens Woodcraft Expo.** Demonstrations of wood turning and fine woodcraft displayed by local craftspeople. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 10am-3pm. hollardgardens.nz. **June 26**
- **Auckland Iris Society fundraiser.** \$1 plant sale of iris species, perennials. Afternoon tea \$2. Garden topic: dry shade. 16 Kain St, Mt Eden. 2-4pm. Contact Rosabelle 09 620 4523. **June 26**

SOUTH ISLAND

June

- **Dunedin Botanic Garden Hort Talk.** Life-saving frogs: you'll miss them when they're gone, by Professor Phil Bishop, Director of the Ecology degree programme, University of Otago. Frogs play an integral role in the ecosystem and are sensitive indicators of the health of the environment. While biodiversity in general is in decline, frogs are the most threatened group of vertebrates and the loss of these species will have a severe impact on human welfare. Information Centre, near duck pond. 12 noon. Free admission.

Free event listings.

Send your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: Events Guide, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with "Event Listing" in the subject line.

ROSE PRUNING

NZ Rose Society pruning demonstrations are free and open to the public.

For further information, see nzroses.org.nz or facebook.com/nzroses

- **North Otago.** Oamaru North School, Torridge St, Oamaru. 1pm. Rain day July 2. **June 25**
- **Franklin.** Roselands Shopping Centre, Great South Rd, Papakura. From 8.30am. **July 2**
- **Manawatu.** Dugald Mackenzie Rose Garden, Victoria Esplanade, Palmerston North. 2pm. **July 2**
- **Wairarapa.** Queen Elizabeth Park Rose Gardens, Masterton. 11am-12noon. Rain day July 9. **July 2**
- **Southland.** 37 Vyner Road. Otatura. 2pm. **July 2**
- **South Canterbury.** Mr & Mrs Handy, Handy's Lane, Levels Highway, Timaru. 1.30pm. **July 16**
- **Horowhenua.** Nola Simpson Rose Gardens, Cambridge St, Levin. From 9am. **July 16-17**

new zealand gardener

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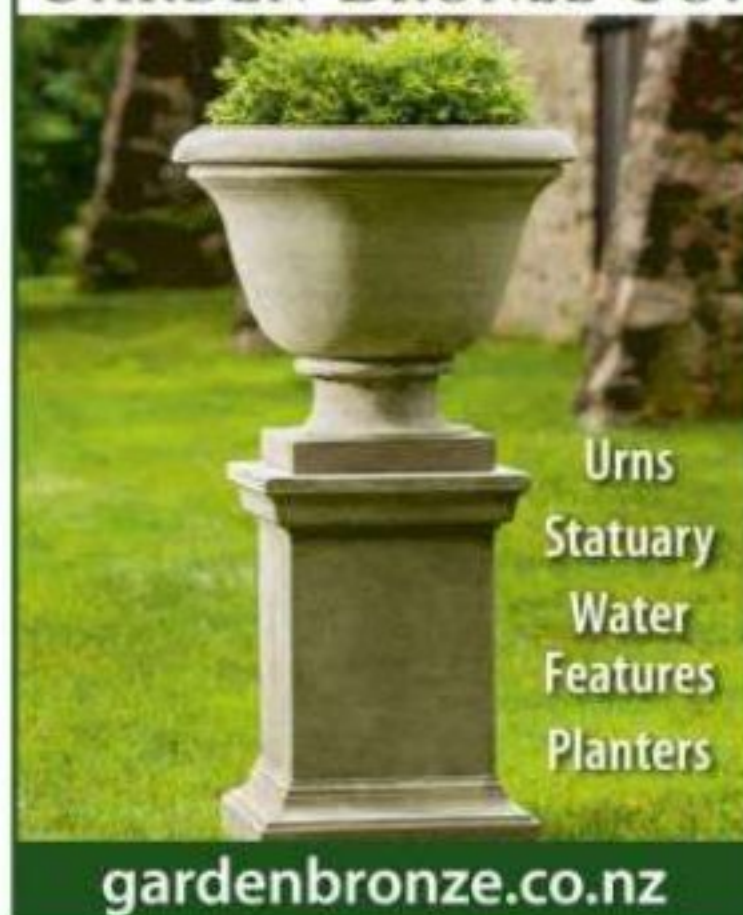
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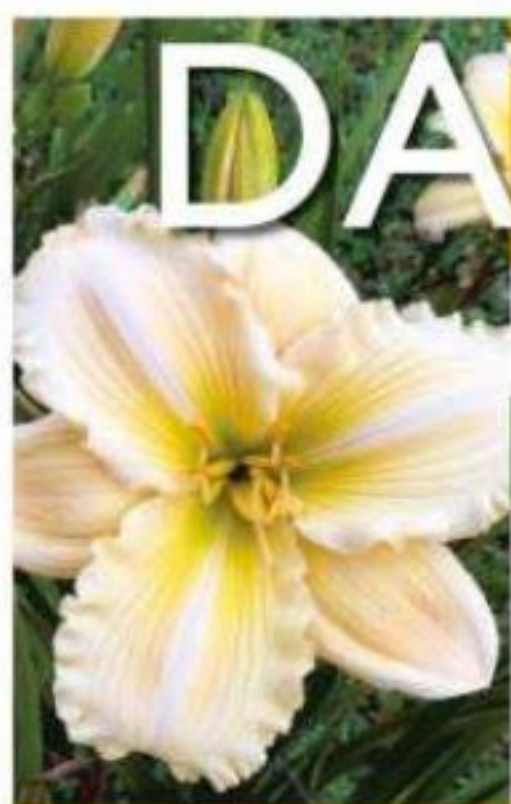
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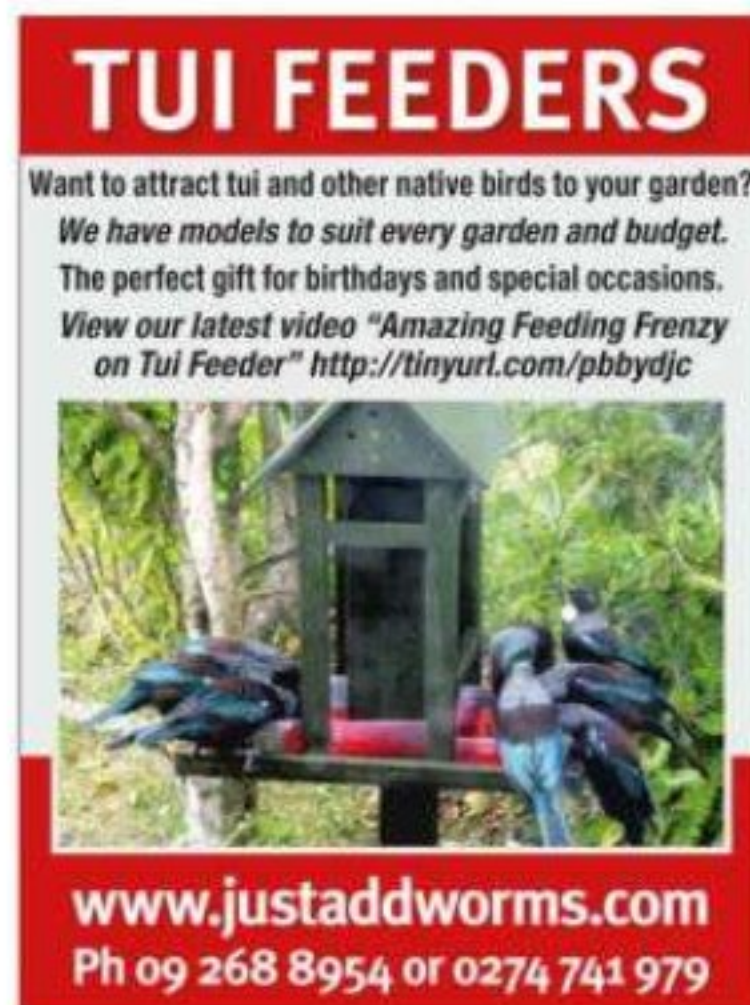


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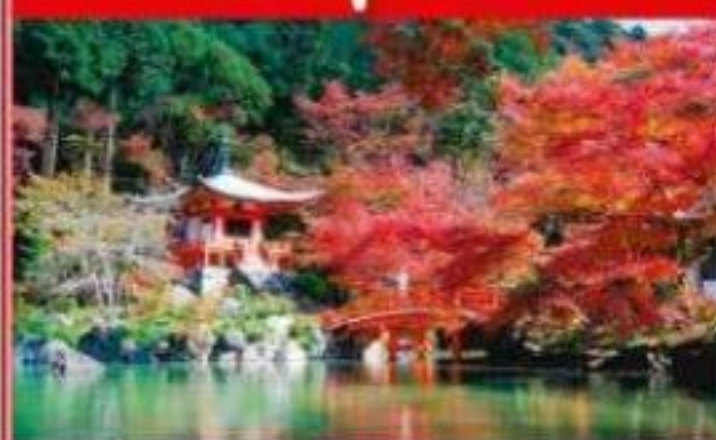
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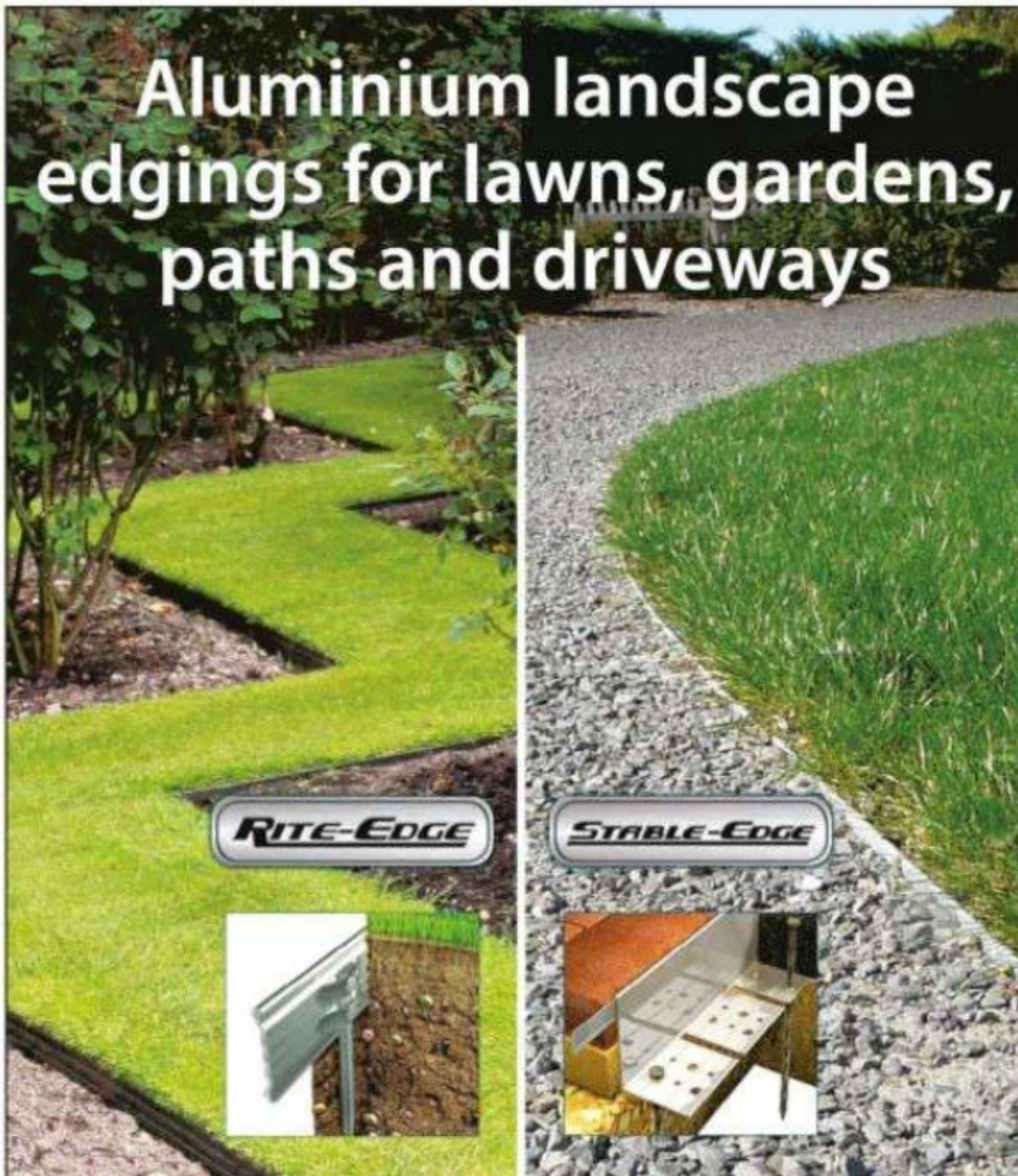
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In which our Southern man and garden consultant to the stars may or may not have provided the inspiration for some of the better-known song lyrics of the 60s and 70s

Not everyone knows I was once garden consultant to the stars. I specialised in the big balladeers of the 60s and 70s, the men whose concerts ended in a confetti of thrown knickers.

They were busy men, with no time to wield a hoe or dibber, so they left all that to me. They asked only that whenever they came home for a few days, there was a garden for them to enjoy and boast about. And if I occasionally helped them with a song lyric or two, well, that was a bonus.

It all began with John Rowles, though he never actually became a client. He just rang me one day in the mid-60s. "Rowles here," he began, matter-of-factly. "I gather you're a garden consultant. You any good?"

I was almost too overwhelmed to speak. I stammered something about there not being a patch of soil on God's good earth that I couldn't turn into paradise given a decent budget and a trusting client, but John interrupted.

"Yeah, yeah mate," he said, "but listen. Here's my problem. I came home last night with a chook to roast and went out into the garden for something to pep it up a bit, to give it a bit of flavour, and what did I find? Nothing. Zilch. Nada. What sort of a garden do you call that?"

"A hopeless garden," I said.

"Ex-bloody-actly," said John Rowles.

"And it wouldn't happen in any garden on which I'd consulted," I said. "The first thing I do is to plant herbs by the kitchen door. Thyme's a particular favourite."

"Thyme," said Rowles wistfully, "if I only had thyme. You're right. You are good." And he rang off. I never heard from him again.

Rowles may have got away but I was hooked. I loved the idea of garden consulting to the great male voices, so I started pitching for business. And that, dear reader, is how I ended up spending the night in a garden centre with Engelbert Humperdinck.

I rang him, you see. Of course, he wasn't Engelbert back then. He was just plain Arnold Dorsey, a virtual unknown. But I'd heard a recording and a certain something told me he was going places so I decided to hitch my wheelbarrow to his vocal tractor.

"I'm the garden consultant you'll need," I said to him on the phone, "when you're too famous and busy to have time to look for one."

Flattery opens doors. "You got any good ideas?" he said.

"Does the pope wear a dress?" I said. "Meet me down the garden centre in five and I'll astonish you." And five minutes later there we were, Engelbert, me and his sideburns. He wanted to linger over the displays of zinnia, nasturtium and impatiens and other trite bait for the fishy masses, but I was having none of it. I led him into the far recesses of the garden centre, where the good stuff dwelt, the textural and sculptural vegetation with which I have always liked to weave my horticultural magic.

And so deep we plunged and so engrossed we became that neither of us noticed when the staff left and locked the place up with us inside.

"What are we going to do?" asked Engelbert when he realised what had happened.

"Nothing much we can do," I said.

"But I'm hungry," wailed Engelbert.

Rootling around I found some novelty chocolates called Heroes of Hollywood. The Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne boxes were empty, but Walt Disney was still half full. I gave Engelbert a handful to keep him quiet.

When it got dark we lay down on some bales of pea straw and made blankets out of shade cloth. I've slept in many worse beds, but Engelbert wasn't happy. Every minute or so he'd complain of insects in his sideburns and make a terrible fuss until I calmed him down with another of my dwindling stock of Walt Disney chocolates. By the time Engelbert finally fell asleep I was down to two. I was just dropping off myself, when Engelbert sat upright yet again.

"It's no good," he exclaimed, slapping at his cheeks, "I just can't stand it, I'm going to have to sing for help."

"Oh for God's sake, no," I said. "Not 'Please Release Me'. Every reader will have seen it coming half a page ago. It's just so bloody obvious."

"And The Last Waltz isn't?" replied Engelbert.

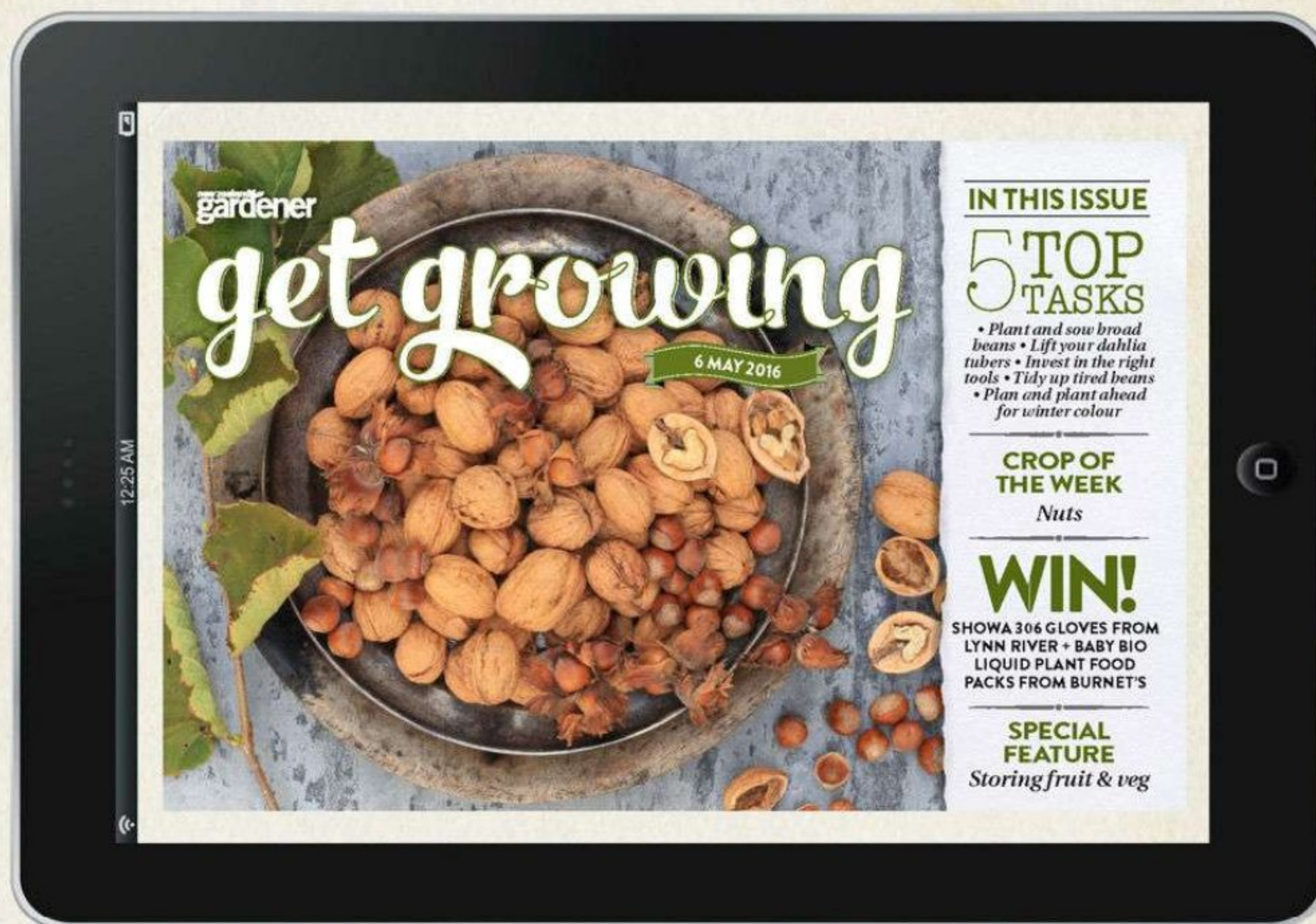
"Touché," I said. "Let's eat them and go to sleep." And we did. ❀



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